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THE EDITORS

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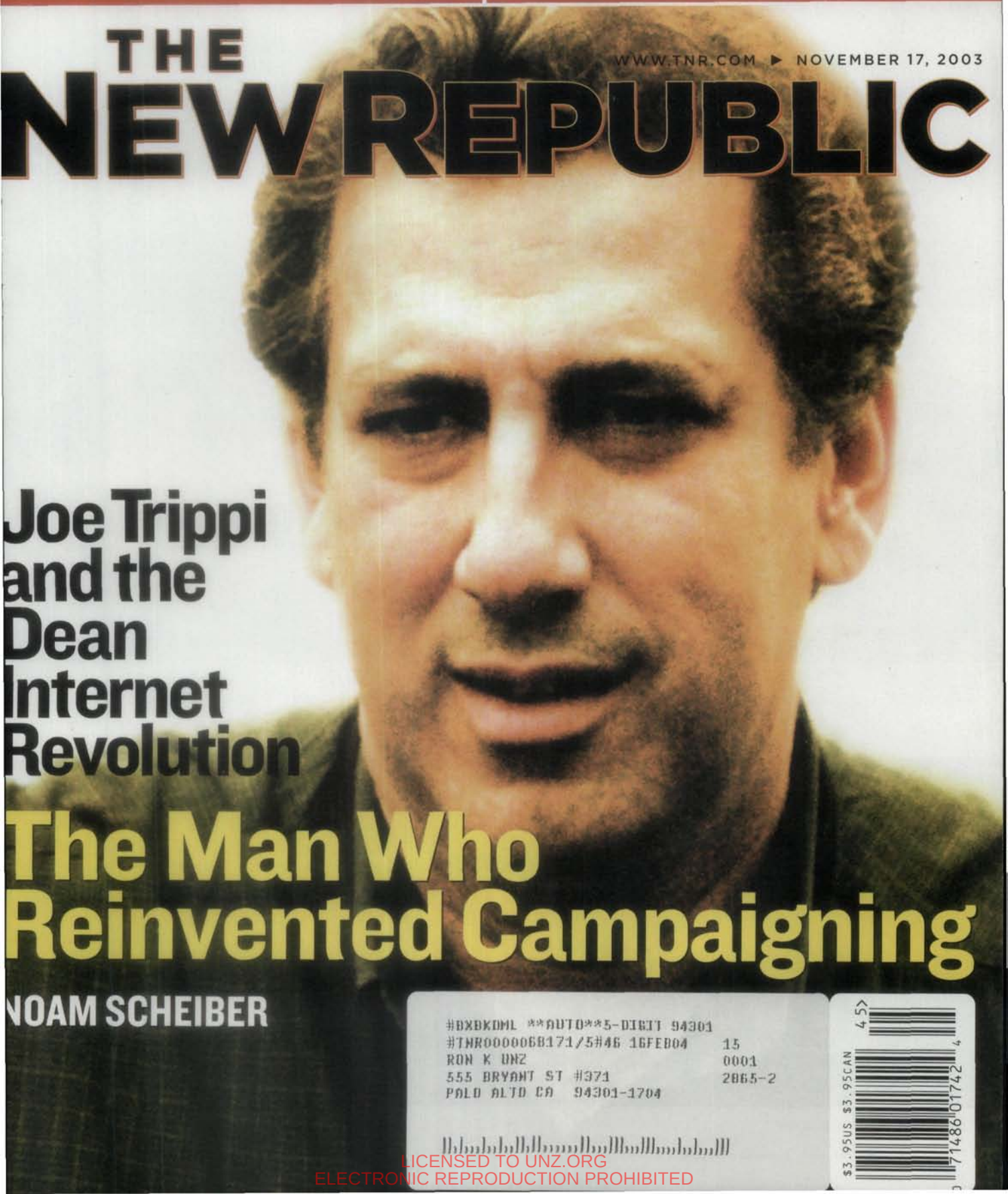

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NOVEMBER 17, 2003 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,635 VOLUME 229

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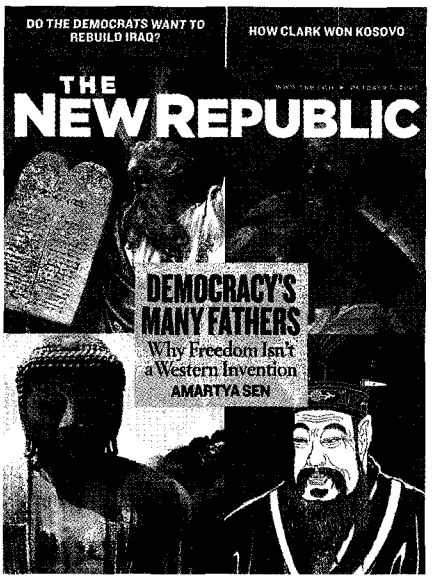
DO THE DEMOCRATS WANT TO REBUILD IRAQ?
HOW CLARK WON KOSOVO
THE NEW REPUBLIC
DEMOCRACY'S MANY FATHERS
Why Freedom Isn't a Western Invention
AMARTYA SEN

TROUBLE AT HOME

BOTH THE "LABOR PAIN" EDITORIAL and Jeffrey D. Sachs's "Spring Broke" article ignore the most important realities about America's economic relations with the world's poorest countries and the main causes of the Third World's impoverishment (September 29).

Rich-country farm subsidies, however objectionable on other grounds, do not deserve significant blame for either "condemn[ing] millions of Third World farmers to poverty," as THE NEW REPUBLIC's editorial claims, or for sub-Saharan Africa's woes, as Sachs insists. And both pieces conspicuously ignore America's record of providing economic opportunity for developing countries.

For all the charges of subsidized U.S. agricultural dumping in Third World markets, U.S. agricultural exports to the world's least-developed countries increased by about 45 percent for the entire 1990–2002 period. And, despite U.S. trade barriers, U.S. agricultural imports from these countries' much less productive farm sectors increased by 50 percent in those years.

Meanwhile, U.S. imports of the manufactured goods that represent these countries' best hopes of overcoming poverty soared by 296 percent between 1990 and 2002. U.S.-manufactured exports to these markets increased less than one-fourth as fast, by 70 percent. Moreover, International Monetary Fund research has shown conclusively that the highest trade barriers to Third World exports are not America's, but Europe's and Japan's.

At the same time, what really keeps the world's poorest countries destitute is pervasive corruption by political and economic elites. Nowhere is this truer than in the four West African cotton-producing countries Sachs lionizes. As reported recently by State Department commercial officers on the ground in Benin, Chad, and Mali, corruption is "perhaps the most daunting obstacle to economic development," "persistent and widespread," and "endemic," respectively. And Burkina Faso ranks in the lower third of Transparency International's 2000 corruption perceptions index.

Ignoring the towering homegrown problems of the world's least-developed countries is a formula for perpetuating poverty, not reducing it. So is blaming the United States first.

ALAN TONELSON
Research Fellow
U.S. Business and Industry Council Educational Foundation
Washington, D.C.

JEFFREY D. SACHS REPLIES:
In the quest for campaign contributions and votes, the Bush administration will take a projected $3.7 billion this year from U.S. taxpayers to give to 25,000 or so uncompetitive cotton farmers, an average subsidy of around $140,000 per recipient. West Africa's peasant cotton growers, already dying of poverty, will be plunged into deeper misery. In characteristically bizarre Washington spin, Alan Tonelson justifies this by attacking African governments rather than our own. His non sequitur is compounded by the fact that Benin and Mali are actually multiparty democracies that are trying to hang on to freedom despite their extreme impoverishment, which is now exacerbated by the cotton subsidies. Both countries were recently singled out for praise by Freedom House. We thus spend tens of billions of dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the ostensible grounds of promoting democracy, and thereby our security, while undermining democracies in West Africa and other impoverished regions through protectionist trade policies and other missteps of foreign policy. The cotton subsidies, of course, are part of the rot of America's money-drenched politics. Not surprisingly, the United States scores very poorly relative to most other rich countries in the corruption index of Transparency International that Tonelson cites.

DISSOLUTION

I APPLAUD DINA TEMPLE-RASTON FOR her well-meaning, albeit incomplete, critique of the recent election in Rwanda ("Quiet Riot," October 6). Having recently returned from Kigali, I understand the Rwandans' grumbling about President Kagame's autocratic rule; his effective disbandment of the Mouvement Democratique Republicain (MDR), however, must be understood in the appropriate context.

The MDR was not merely a "Hutu-dominated" opposition party, as Temple-Raston asserts; rather, it was the extremist party of the *genocidaires* of 1994, whose hateful, anti-Tutsi ideology led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, primarily Tutsi, in the century's fastest genocide. The MDR made strides toward reform in post-genocide Rwanda, but one can neither deny its long history of violent propagandizing nor forget the tragic consequences. Temple-Raston would do well to remember that the Nazi Party was banned in Germany after World War II for its role in crimes akin to those in Rwanda. So, while I concede that Faustin Twagiramungu is no Hitler, I emphasize this: Neither is Kagame.

COLIN HARRIS HUNTER
Medford, Oregon

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Critics have responded. At this year's Emmy Awards, cable shows won Emmys in category after category – 78 winners in all. Same story earlier this year when the Peabodys and Golden Globes were announced.

And viewers are voting with their remotes. For the first time, more people are watching cable during primetime than the broadcast networks. And cable news channels account for 60% of all TV news viewership.

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These are the results of Congress deregulating the cable industry. Talk about impact. This is not the cable business of seven years ago. This is an industry that's on the move. On faster forward, if you will.

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The Menace

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

HOWARD DEAN KNOWS THE perils of trying to have it both ways on Iraq. After all, he has spent the last year clobbering John Kerry for supporting war in the Senate while denouncing it on the campaign trail. So imagine Dean's surprise when, at the October 9 Democratic debate in Phoenix, Dennis Kucinich turned the charge against him. "This morning, in *The New York Times*, [Dean] wouldn't take a position on the eighty-seven billion dollars, and the governor says that he's still for keeping seventy thousand troops in Iraq," said Kucinich. "Now, it's either right or wrong. If we're wrong to be there, as I believe we are, we should get our troops out."

Kucinich, of course, is no threat to Dean's front-runner status. But his critique does make a certain sense. Dean's attacks hurt Kerry because the logic behind them was so clear: If you think the war is so bad, why did you vote for it? Today, however, the debate has largely shifted from war to postwar. Dean and other leading Democrats are calling the Iraq occupation a disaster that is breaking the bank, poisoning America's reputation around the world, and sending young men and women home in body bags. To which Kucinich asks a logical question: If you think the postwar is so bad, why not bring Americans home?

None of the leading Democrats want to withdraw from Iraq, but their refusal to plausibly answer Kucinich's question may be pushing them in that direction. Kerry, John Edwards, Wesley Clark, and—more ambiguously—Dean, all opposed President Bush's $87 billion reconstruction request because they said he lacked a plan to win the peace in Iraq. But that's not true. Bush does have a plan, even if he's not quite honest about it: It's for the United States to stabilize and rebuild Iraq largely alone, by pouring in money and handing over security to hastily trained Iraqi forces. The Democratic candidates may dislike that strategy, but it is they who have no practical alternative.

Asked what they would do in Iraq, Dean, Kerry, Edwards, and Clark all give the same response: hand over political control to the United Nations and bring in lots of foreign troops. It has been left to debate moderators to note that, while that might have been a plausible strategy six months ago, it is wishful thinking today. "You make it sound very simple," CNN's Judy Woodruff said to Clark at the Phoenix debate. "We'll go to the U.N. They'll bring their [troops]. . . . We're finding out that's been very, very difficult to do." A month earlier in Baltimore, Juan Williams asked Edwards, "If international forces don't show up [in Iraq], should we increase the U.S. presence or leave?" Edwards replied, "Well, I don't accept that premise."

But that premise happens to be reality. In Phoenix, Clark proposed turning "the economic and political piece [of the Iraq occupation] over to the United Nations; they can do it best." They can't do it from Turtle Bay, however, which is where the U.N.'s Iraq staff is today, having fled after an August 19 car bomb killed 23 U.N. officials. Clark and other Democrats have a chicken-and-egg problem: They want the United Nations to help stabilize Iraq, but the United Nations won't return until Iraq is stable and its staff can work safely. In the meantime, "the economic and political piece" will, by necessity, be run by the United States.

In addition to U.N. political control, the Democrats want large infusions of foreign troops. Kerry has demanded that the Bush administration "have other troops on the ground share the burden." A September 4 press release from Dean's campaign explained that the former governor "believes in an international force in Iraq." But, unfortunately, the rest of the world no longer does. Given the recent escalation of violence, there is zero chance that foreign governments will fork over lots of new troops. Even Poland and Spain, America's staunchest pro-war allies, sent troops only to the safest zone in Iraq. Perhaps, when the security situation improves, foreign governments will grow less skittish. But, then, when the security situation improves, foreign troops will no longer be needed.

Opposing Bush's reconstruction plan, and lacking a realistic one of their own, the Democratic candidates are vulnerable to Kucinich's logic. After all, if you don't have a strategy for winning the peace in Iraq, why stay? Democratic public opinion is clearly moving in this direction. A CBS poll in late August found that 53 percent of Democrats wanted the United States to either increase troop levels in Iraq or hold them steady, versus 37 percent who wanted to decrease the number. By last week, that figure had reversed itself. In a late October *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, 54 percent of Democrats said the "U.S. should withdraw forces from Iraq to avoid casualties," while only 40 percent wanted to keep them there.

With the exception of Joseph Lieberman, who courageously notes that the United States may need to send *more* troops to Iraq, leading Democratic candidates are subtly shifting closer to Kucinich. Back in April, Dean proposed that American troops stay in Iraq for more than two years. On NBC's "Meet the Press" in June, he said, "I know that we don't have enough people in Iraq. I know that General Shinseki said that we need three hundred thousand troops to go into Iraq."

But, today, Dean no longer thinks the United States has too few troops in Iraq; he thinks we have too many. A recent Dean commercial fretted, "One hundred thirty thousand troops in Iraq with no end in sight." And, in early October, he told *The New York Times* he would reduce American troop levels to 70,000 (while bringing in 110,000 mostly Muslim and Arab troops). Yet even that 70,000 proposal, paired with his skepticism about the $87 billion, leaves him vulnerable to Kucinich, who pledges to bring home all the troops by year's end.

The unhappy truth is that, by mishandling postwar Iraq and alienating much of the world, the Bush administration has left the United States with two bad options: rebuild Iraq largely alone, at great cost in money and lives (and with no guarantee of success), or withdraw largely alone, in a Vietnam-like defeat. The leading Democratic presidential contenders, who like most candidates hate tough choices, are trying to pretend they don't have to make one. But the longer they oppose the Bush reconstruction strategy, the more they will find themselves pushed toward the alternative, which is no reconstruction at all. On Iraq, Kucinich now represents the Democratic vanguard. Unless the other candidates face reality, he could soon represent the Democratic mainstream.

PETER BEINART

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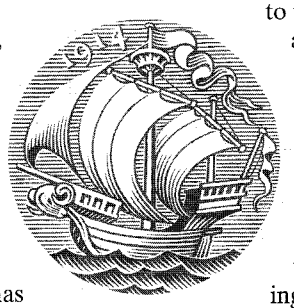
Crunch Time

THE RISING TIDE of bloodshed in Iraq does not seem to have made the slightest impression on Donald Rumsfeld. Touting the good news on the Sunday talk-show circuit this week, the Defense secretary assured the nation that, despite the escalation of violence in Iraq, "there has not been a need for additional U.S. forces." Instead, Rumsfeld intends to withdraw 30,000 soldiers by next summer. This insistence that the United States has deployed sufficient troops to Iraq has become a favorite mantra among administration officials—and among their critics. Senator John Kerry said in September that dispatching more troops to Iraq would be the "worst thing" the United States could do.

But the unlikely duo of Rumsfeld and Kerry has things backward. The United States shouldn't be drawing down its troop levels in Iraq; it should be building them up. Two months ago, the commander of coalition forces in Iraq, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, said that, if attacks escalate, "that would be an additional security challenge out there that I do not have sufficient forces for." Well, the attacks have escalated—from roughly a dozen per day during the summer to over 30 per day now. And, as the events of the past week show, not only U.S. installations but also Iraqi government buildings, humanitarian organizations, weapons depots, and oil pipelines need to be secured. Without adequate security, groups essential to rebuilding Iraq simply cannot function. And, at the moment, the U.S. Army is the only force that can provide this security. But the same overstretched force must also combat what has become a full-blown insurgency.

The administration's response to all this? "Our goal," Rumsfeld says, "is not to create a dependency in Iraq by flooding it with Americans." But the soldier-to-population ratio during past military occupations has rarely been so low. A recent RAND Corporation study recounts that, in postwar Germany, which the Bush team frequently cites as a model, the United States deployed one soldier for every ten citizens. In Iraq today, coalition forces field one soldier for every 154 citizens.

Their disavowals notwithstanding, the Bush team understands the problem all too well, which is why they have spent the past few months crisscrossing the globe in search of manpower. Alas, the French and the Germans, while supporting resolutions that lend the U.N.'s imprimatur to the occupation, have no intention of lending anything beyond that. Such is the administration's desperation that it has been reduced to imploring Turkey for help, despite Washington's earlier pledge to keep Iraq's longtime foe from meddling in the country's affairs. The administration has now latched on to the idea of "Iraqifying" the war—transferring the responsibility for securing Iraq to Iraqis. Yet the mistaken logic of "Iraqification" is precisely the logic of "Vietnamization," whereby the United States entrusted foreign proxies to mask a collapse of U.S. will. Washington lost that earlier war, and, if it expects Iraqi policemen to triumph over America's foes, it will lose this one, too. Rumsfeld claims that "over one hundred thousand" Iraqis have been trained to provide security. But, a month ago, L. Paul Bremer put it at 60,000. Whatever the true number, racing to put an Iraqi force in the field also means putting a less competent force in the field. The Iraqis trained so far by the United States still lack equipment and, in many cases, have received only a week of training and suffer from low morale. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported last month, several Iraqi policemen "said they were under pressure from their families to leave the force" because the policemen were being targeted by their countrymen. If even crack American troops cannot quash the insurgents, how can poorly trained, besieged Iraqi security forces fare any better?



In fact, neither international troops, Iraqis, nor Rumsfeld's vision of a revolution in military technology provides an adequate response to the challenges in Iraq. To avoid a U.S. defeat, the administration will need to call up more reserve and National Guard units and deploy Marines to Iraq, steps it is beginning to take. But it will need to do so without reducing the overall troop count in Iraq, as it plans to by next spring. It may even have to expand the troop strength of the Army, an option Rumsfeld stubbornly refuses to entertain. Any of these steps could exact a steep political price from the White House and perhaps even mean losing the election in 2004. But, even for President Bush, losing the war would be far worse. ■

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NOTEBOOK

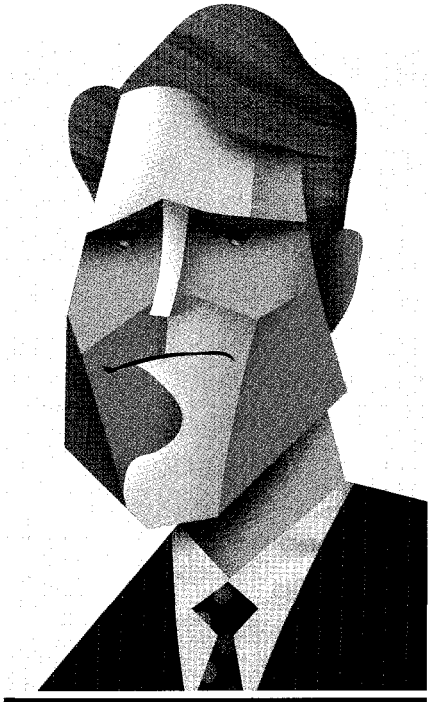
KANSTEINER CRITICS STEP UP . . . REAGAN SUPPORTERS FLIP OUT

TRIAL RUN

WHEN LAST WE CHECKED IN WITH Walter H. Kansteiner III, the Bush administration's man in charge of Africa policy at the State Department, he was monitoring delicate negotiations between Nigeria and Liberia to provide a cushy exile for Charles Taylor, the Liberian ex-president indicted for war crimes by an international tribunal known as the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Criticized for championing exile for Taylor rather than a trial, Kansteiner and his aides would roll their eyes and promise that, after they had gotten Taylor out of war-torn Liberia—where he fomented a decade of killing that cost West Africa hundreds of thousands of lives across four countries—the administration would work on bringing him to justice.

Well, last week Kansteiner returned to his home in the Virginia horse country and to his career in the private sector, where he works as an adviser to corporations doing mergers and acquisitions in Africa. But it looks like he never got around to revealing his secret plan for getting Taylor to the court. And, as predicted by those opposed to cutting a deal with Taylor, the warlord has not gone quietly into retirement. From his coastal mansion in Calabar, Nigeria, he has been busy meddling in Liberian politics, calling his former ministers several times a day, directing his old allies, and jeopardizing the country's fragile reconciliation process. "Taylor is clearly rebuilding his network," Jaques Klein, the U.N.'s special representative to Liberia, recently said. "He is like a vampire. Until you drive a stake in his heart, he won't die."

When it became clear that Kansteiner and the State Department weren't pushing to try Taylor, a bipartisan group of senators, including Democrat Pat Leahy and Republican Mitch McConnell, dusted off a plan that was extremely effective in getting Slobodan



Walter H. Kansteiner III

Milosevic to the Hague two years ago. Their proposal would suspend U.S. aid to any country harboring individuals indicted by the Special Court. Faced with a choice between millions of U.S. dollars and protecting Taylor, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria would likely have no choice but to deliver Taylor to the Special Court. In case of any pressing national security concerns, the president could even waive the restriction. But, incredibly, as Kansteiner was emptying out his office last week, his Bureau of African Affairs, not wanting policy made for it, was voicing its opposition to the legislation. The bill's fate, and perhaps Taylor's, will be determined in the backrooms of an appropriations-bill conference committee in the coming days. Kansteiner is now gone, but his attitude, sadly, lives on.

CREDIT CHECK

THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (P.A.) has gone apoplectic. After the U.S. State Department announced this week that it was offering a reward of up to $5 million for information leading to the arrest or conviction of those who carried out the October 15 bombing of the Gaza convoy carrying American diplomats—a bombing that killed three American security guards—Palestinian officials complained that the United States was unnecessarily meddling in their affairs. Colonel Rashid Abu Shabak, the P.A. head of the Preventive Security Service in Gaza, whined, "This is an insulting announcement because it deals with a people whose mouth does not water in the face of financial temptations. . . . We don't work as mercenaries for anyone."

Of course, the cash inducement was put on the table precisely because there is suspicion in Israel that Palestinian officials won't track down the culprits. What's more, the P.A.'s record in finding and arresting terrorists does not exactly build confidence. Soon after the bombing, eight Palestinians were detained, but, apparently, most of them have been released, potentially preventing the FBI investigators from getting information from them. And, since then, developments have gotten even murkier. The P.A. has arrested two more alleged suspects, though it has admitted these men were not central to the crime, and an unknown group called The Popular Resistance Committee has claimed credit for the murders. Not surprising, then, that the United States might want to go over the heads of the P.A. and get information directly from average Palestinians. After all, our government, unlike theirs, takes terrorism seriously.

REALITY BITES

IT TOOK CBS TWO WEEKS TO CAVE on its miniseries "The Reagans." After *The New York Times* ran an article detailing parts of the script, the conservative Media Research Center, the Re-

DAVID COWLES

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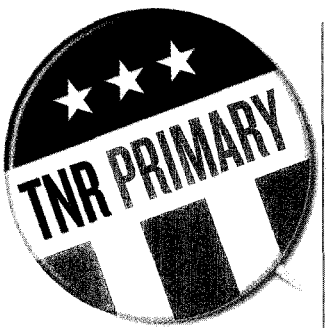
publican National Committee (RNC), and *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page registered their complaints—publicly and with the network's advertisers. After RNC Chairman Ed Gillespie demanded that CBS either allow Reagan pals to screen the series for historical accuracy or display a "this-is-fiction" disclaimer every ten minutes during the broadcast, CBS decided to move the series to the less journalistically rigorous Showtime.

Why the foofaraw? The largest of several objections concerns a scene in which Ronald Reagan, played by James Brolin, is unable to recognize the onset of the AIDS crisis and seems insensitive to homosexuals. To be sure, there is no evidence Reagan uttered the script's offending quote about gays: "They that live in sin shall die in sin." But, as the *The New York Times*' Jim Rutenberg noted, Edmund Morris's biography, *Dutch*, quotes Reagan as saying, "Maybe the Lord brought down this plague" because "illicit sex is against the Ten Commandments." (And, no, the quotes in *Dutch* are not fictional.) Even if the "die in sin" line is apocryphal, the context is not. Reagan *did* ignore the AIDS epidemic for almost six years, substantively addressing it only in April 1987, after HIV had already infected 1.5 million Americans. Dismissing the pleas of his own blue-ribbon commission for more research money, he instead suggested that AIDS be combatted with instruction in morality.

Many other criticisms of the series are similarly devoid of merit. For example, Nancy Reagan apparently did—however much it upsets the president's hagiographers—set the White House schedule based on astrology, as former Reagan Chief of Staff Donald Regan revealed in his memoir, *For the Record*. Ronald Reagan was known to relate events from movies as if they had happened in real life. In "The Reagans" there seems to be little distinction. ■



MOVING TARGET
Candidate: Howard Dean
Category: Intellectual Honesty
Grade: D

The recent flap over Howard Dean's opposition to an assault-weapons ban—expressed in his response to a National Rifle Association (NRA) questionnaire when he was running for governor of Vermont in 1992—is mostly overblown. At the time, after all, he was a fairly small-time parochial pol in a state with virtually no gun violence. This is especially true given that, today, when it really matters, Dean's position on gun control is no different than that of most mainstream Democrats.

The problem is that, when the questionnaire leaked last week, Dean's spokesmen argued that their boss has always supported a ban on assault weapons—just not one so broad that it would unfairly punish benevolent hunters in rural areas like Vermont. The NRA questionnaire, they argued, forced Dean into an oversimplified either/or position—allowing him no room to back a ban on AK-47s without seeming to oppose, say, hunting shotguns as well.

The trouble is, the questionnaire *did* allow Dean to make this distinction, inviting him to respond that he supported a ban on "some semi-automatic firearms" and list which ones. But Dean didn't bite, opting instead to say that he opposed any ban. Again, what Dean said back in 1992 doesn't seem terribly significant. It's his campaign's spin that does. —Michael Crowley

DOING THE RIGHT THING
Candidate: Dick Gephardt
Category: General Likeability
Grade: A

At last week's debate in Detroit, moderator Gwen Ifill asked Dick Gephardt why he had voted in favor of President Bush's request for $87 billion to finance the reconstruction and occupation of postwar Iraq, noting that two of Gephardt's rivals—John Edwards and John Kerry—had voted against the authorization even though they voted for the war last fall. Gephardt answered, "I think we all try to do what we think is right. . . . And I can't find it within myself to not vote for the money to support the troops."

A few thoughts here: First, Gephardt deserves credit for the vote itself, given that his support for the war has become a major liability in the primaries. Second, Gephardt spoke these lines with an understated, thoughtful, even magnanimous tone. Indeed, rather than take the opportunity to tweak Edwards or Kerry for their votes (as Joe Lieberman would do in the very next exchange), Gephardt went out of his way to defend other Democrats who have challenged the president: "We've got some differences here in opinion about this war and the money. But I think it's an abomination for this administration and this president to call people who disagree with him, as sometimes we do, as lacking patriotism. I think the highest act of patriotism is saying what we believe." —Jonathan Cohn

HIDING IN THE GRASSROOTS
Candidate: Howard Dean
Category: Intellectual Honesty
Grade: D

Once upon a time, when Dean was an upstart candidate, he pledged to participate in the public-financing system, which would entitle him to federal matching funds but would also limit his campaign spending to $45 million. But that was before Dean raked in more than $25 million in campaign contributions and before President Bush made clear that he was going to opt out of the public-financing system so he could raise and spend up to $170 million in the primary season. Now Dean also wants to opt out, but, to avoid looking like a hypocrite, he has decided to act as if his supporters are telling him to do it. This week, Dean sent out e-mails to 500,000 Deaniacs asking them whether he should forgo public financing. His campaign has pledged to abide by their decision.

There's only one problem. The language Dean's campaign uses in its poll is so blatantly slanted in favor of the opt-out option that it's hard to see how any Dean supporter would choose to stick with the public-financing system. If Dean's campaign accepts federal matching funds, the e-mail warns, "the greatest grassroots movement in the history of presidential politics will be stopped from raising money almost immediately. . . . [Bush's campaign] will have a $155 million spending advantage against us. From March through August, they will be able to define and distort us, and we will have no way to defend ourselves." Dean has good reason to opt out, but he should admit that the decision is his and his alone.

—Jason Zengerle

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CARICATURES BY ZACH TRENHOLM

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The tax cut is still wrong.

Fast One

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

When the news broke last week that the economy had grown at a 7.2 percent annual rate last quarter, it didn't take long for President Bush and his supporters to spring into action. "The tax relief we passed is working," gloated the president in an Ohio speech. "DEMOCRATS WON'T GIVE BUSH CREDIT FOR GAINS," accused a *Washington Times* headline. "Notwithstanding the third quarter's 7.2% growth boom, Democrats seem undaunted in attacking President Bush's economic policies," scolded a *Wall Street Journal* editorial. This argument has just enough surface plausibility to be taken seriously by the mainstream media. "Is it time for skeptics to admit they were wrong about President Bush's tax cuts?" wrote *New York Times* economic reporter Edmund L. Andrews in an October 19 column. "To the surprise of many naysayers, economic data from the past several months suggests that the $350 billion tax-cut package may indeed have jolted the economy." Take that, you lousy skeptics!

At this point, it's worth recalling what us "naysayers" actually said. First, we protested that Bush's 2001 tax cut, and the two that followed, were highly regressive. Certainly nothing has happened to weaken this case. Second, we predicted the tax cuts would leave the government strapped at a time when it needed to prepare for the baby-boomer retirement. With deficits projected to total $5 trillion over the next decade, I'd say we've been vindicated on this point. And, finally, we argued that, in the long run, higher debt would harm the economy. By "the long run," I should note, we didn't mean "the third quarter of 2003."

Alas, it was inevitable that the first quarter of rapid growth, whenever it came, would bring demands that tax-cut critics repent. Yet it's not as if Bush has brought about a particularly fast recovery. We've endured three years of subpar growth—the longest stretch since the early '80s. People have been predicting a recovery for more than a year. ("THE HOT-AND-COLD RECOVERY COULD WARM UP SOON," one *BusinessWeek* headline forecast twelve months ago.) So the mere fact of a recovery—assuming we're in one—tells us little. Every economic downturn in the history of the United States has ended at some point. That's why they call it the "business cycle." I suppose it would be possible for the downturn not to end, but that would basically require our civilization to disappear from the face of the earth, like Sumer. To credit Bush with avoiding this outcome sets the bar awfully low.

Now, did the tax cuts hasten the recovery? Almost certainly they did. But, again, few suggested otherwise. Allow me to quote myself. "This is not to say Bush's tax cut wouldn't boost consumer demand at all," I wrote in these pages last June. "It would." The debate wasn't over whether the tax cut would boost the economy; it was over how best to do so. Bush and his allies thought the economy had a long-term problem (high Clinton-era tax rates were discouraging investors and entrepreneurs from innovating and investing) that required a long-term solution (permanently cut upper-bracket tax rates and eliminate the estate tax). Democrats thought the economy had a short-term problem (consumer demand was too low), so they countered with a short-term solution (put more cash in people's pockets immediately through middle-class rebates, temporary business-investment credits, and aid to states). The tax cuts Congress passed ended up combining both elements but included far less short-term stimulus than liberals wanted. But, again, that we could have ended the slowdown sooner was the secondary objection. The main objection was that we could have done so with short-term measures that didn't mortgage our economic future.

Indeed, the tax cuts are buying relatively little gain considering their enormous price. Earlier this year, Economy.com, a nonpartisan forecasting group, calculated the "bang for the buck" of various stimulus proposals. Those favored by Democrats tended to have high scores—for instance, extending emergency unemployment benefits by a dollar would boost GDP by $1.73. Those favored by Bush tended to have lower scores—a dollar spent reducing the dividend tax would raise GDP by nine cents. The administration's Council of Economic Advisers predicted the tax cuts would produce 1.4 million new jobs. Given the tax cut's $700 billion or more ten-year cost, opponents pointed out, this came out to some half a million dollars per new job. And, even if employment picks up, as it should, we probably won't get a million new jobs, which would drive the dollars-per-job figure even higher.

It's therefore a bit galling that Bush and his allies are performing a victory dance. But it's not terribly surprising. The Bush administration has elevated the non-falsifiable argument into a kind of comic art form—witness the president's claim that violence in Iraq means we're winning. Nowhere is this more true than in the defense of its tax cuts. In 1999, Bush put forward his tax-cut plan as an "insurance policy" for a booming economy. In the two years after it passed, he lambasted skeptics on the grounds that "raising taxes in the midst of a recession is wrong economic policy." His new line is that, "just as the economy is coming around, some over in Washington say now is the time to raise taxes."

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UPDATE

SAUDI ARABIA: WAR ON TERRORISM

BANKING AND FINANCE

One of the most effective weapons in the fight against terrorism is the ability to choke off its financing. Terrorists have learned that one way to finance their operations is by siphoning off funds from contributions meant for humanitarian relief and development projects. Of particular concern to Saudi Arabia are the donations received and distributed by charitable organizations, because charitable giving is one of the basic tenets of Islam. The regulations governing the dissemination of large funds to those in need must defend against the possibility of misappropriation.

As early as 1995, we set up units to counter money laundering at the Ministry of Interior, in the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) and in our commercial banks. More recently, Saudi Arabia has established a High Commission for oversight of all charities, contributions and donations, as well as a special Financial Intelligence Unit to ensure that funds are not misdirected into the hands of those who would use them to harm others. These regulatory and supervisory agencies have identified potentially problematic activities and enacted a number of changes. For example, no overseas fund transfers are allowed directly from charitable bank accounts, and no ATM cards or credit cards can be issued for these accounts.

We have adopted some of the toughest financial control mechanisms in the world to ensure that our generosity and religious practice cannot be abused. Our nation has completed and submitted two Financial Action Task Force (FATF) self-assessments; one regarding the 40 FATF recommendations on the prevention of money laundering and the other regarding its eight special recommendations on terrorist financing.

Our vigilance has resulted in specific and verifiable actions including:

• In August 2003, the Council of Ministers approved new legislation that puts in place harsh penalties for the crimes of money laundering and terror financing. This legislation stipulates jail sentences of up to 15 years and fines of up to $1.8 million for offenders.

• In May 2003, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) instructed that questionable money transfers be stopped. An update was distributed entitled 'Rules Governing Anti-money Laundering and Combating Terrorist Financing' requiring the full and immediate implementation of nine new policies and procedures.

• In May 2003, Saudi Arabia asked the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation and all Saudi charities to suspend activities outside Saudi Arabia until mechanisms are in place to adequately monitor and control funds so they cannot be misdirected to illegal purposes.

• In February 2003, SAMA began to implement a major technical program to train judges and investigators on legal matters involving terror-financing and money-laundering methods, international requirements for financial secrecy, and methods followed by criminals to exchange information.

• In March 2002, the U.S. Treasury Department and Saudi Arabia blocked the accounts of the Somalia and Bosnia branches of the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation. While the Saudi headquarters for this private charity is dedicated to helping those in need, it was determined that the Somalia and Bosnia branches supported terrorist activities and terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and AIAI (al-Itihaad al-Islamiya).

Increased oversight and international cooperation have also enabled Saudi Arabia to identify and freeze some 41 bank accounts with suspected links to terrorism. Together with the United States, we have taken steps to freeze the assets of a close bin Laden associate and aide, Wa'el Hamza Julaidan, who is believed to have funneled money to Al-Qaeda.

Saudi Arabia will continue to accelerate its counter-terror activities in coordination with the international community in the War on Terrorism.

"Charitable funds can no longer go outside of Saudi Arabia without strict government oversight and control. We have closed the door on the possibility for charitable giving to be misappropriated for illegal purposes."

Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States,
June 12, 2003

"Their [Saudi Arabia's] close oversight of charities to guard against money laundering and terrorist financing sets an example to all countries engaged in the war against terror."

John W. Snow, United States Treasury Secretary
September 17, 2003

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Since neither the administration nor its supporters would ever concede any real-world circumstances under which the tax cuts could be said to have failed, allow me to set out the circumstances under which they should be said to have succeeded. If the economy grows at a faster sustainable rate at the peak of this business cycle than it did during the last business cycle because newly incentivized high-income households worked more, if tax revenue reach the level they were projected to reach before the tax cuts, and if the share of federal taxes paid by workers at the middle and bottom of the spectrum doesn't rise, then I'll admit the tax cuts worked. But one good quarter hardly cuts it. ■

Canadian meds solve nothing.

Drugged

BY JOSH BENSON

THE LATEST DRUG craze sweeping the country involves an idea, not a substance: the prospect of saving billions of dollars by purchasing inexpensive pharmaceuticals from Canada and other countries. Just last week, the Democratic governor of Illinois, Rod Blagojevich, came to Washington brandishing a report estimating his state could save $90.7 million per year by importing drugs from Canada. "It's hard to stop an idea whose time has come," Blagojevich said. "It's undeniable you can get drugs cheaper [from Canada]." The Republican governor of Minnesota, Tim Pawlenty, echoed these sentiments earlier this month, saying his state could save tens of millions of dollars by reimporting drugs. Pawlenty is already making plans to encourage Minnesotans to buy their pharmaceuticals north of the border.

In the past, attempts to buy Canadian drugs have been blocked by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the pharmaceutical industry. But this may soon change. In July, a bipartisan coalition in the House passed H.R. 2427, a bill that directs the FDA to create a system allowing the purchase of drugs manufactured in FDA-certified factories from a select list of foreign counties, including Canada. "In one form or another, we are going to win this thing," Representative Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont and a strong supporter of the legislation, declared recently. "If we can pass a strong drug-reimportation bill in the Senate, similar to what was passed in the House, we can lower the cost of prescription drugs in the country by thirty to fifty percent," he later added.

But that's probably not true. Even a strong reimportation bill is unlikely to permanently cut the cost of most medicines. Then again, opponents who predict a flood of dangerous, counterfeit pharmaceuticals are likely wrong as well. In truth, all hype aside, a prescription-drug-reimportation bill won't have much effect either way.

DRUGS ARE CHEAPER north of the border because, under Canada's national health insurance program, each province negotiates directly with pharmaceutical companies on drug prices. With their enormous purchasing leverage—Ontario, for example, has twelve million residents—the provinces can drive a pretty hard bargain. A prescription for Zoloft, the popular antidepression drug, retails for about $80 in Canada but $230 in Minnesota.

The allure of these low prices has drawn the attention of officials in states across New England and the upper Midwest. As early as 2001, Maine tried to pass legislation creating a reimportation program, though the bill ultimately died. More recently, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Vermont, and New York City have all vowed to examine or implement some form of reimportation.

But drug-industry lobbyists, such as the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), have fought these initiatives, insisting that drugs purchased in Canada are a threat to patients. The FDA has long embraced this position. In particular, the FDA and the drug industry have argued that foreign drugs from countries with lower quality standards could be imported into the United States through Canada. "Here's the problem," one PhRMA official says. Canada is "like a post office" for medicines made elsewhere, making their safety difficult to verify. What's more, the lobbyists say, foreign drugs are particularly susceptible to counterfeiting, a problem they say would multiply uncontrollably under a reimportation scheme.

The trouble with this argument is that reality has already overtaken it. Today, as many as ten million Americans purchase drugs from abroad, whether over the Internet or from walk-in pharmacies across the Canadian and Mexican borders. In fact, if the federal government legalized drug transactions with Canada, it could regulate the trade more closely and offer these consumers a safer alternative. One FDA official even told *The New York Times* that wholesaler reimportation "would limit the scope of risk" from foreign drugs. For example, the bill that passed the House of Representatives this summer allows only the reimportation of drugs already approved by the FDA and produced in factories certified by the Agency. In fact, many U.S. drugs originate in foreign factories already; the reimportation process could be as simple as slapping a new U.S. shipping label on drugs that might ordinarily go—legally—to the United States but have been routed to European markets instead. Safety would be a minimal concern, since these drugs would already be FDA-approved.

What's more, the House bill would not make counterfeiting easier. Already, counterfeit drugs can easily make their way into the United States across borders and via Internet sales. The bill calls for a higher standard of anti-

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counterfeiting technology—including increased labeling, shipping, and packaging standards—than is already being used to guarantee the safety of drug imports. The FDA's own task force last month recommended just these sorts of protections to help thwart the current threat from illegal counterfeiting.

So CANADIAN DRUGS would likely be safe. But would they really save Americans money? Probably not—at least not in the long term. If Canadian imports started seriously undercutting U.S. sales, the drug industry could simply ration supplies to Canada. In July, the Congressional Budget Office predicted that passing drug-import laws would provoke precisely such a response: "Manufacturers of brand-name drugs," the report concluded, "are unlikely to increase their sales in Canada enough" to subsidize the U.S. market. Indeed, U.S. pharmaceutical companies have already taken steps along these lines. In the last month, executives at Pfizer and Merck have assured investors that they are successfully limiting Canadian reimports. Earlier this year, GlaxoSmithKline stopped selling drugs to Canadian-based online pharmacies, and Eli Lilly has curbed sales to all Canadian pharmacies. Since the U.S. market is some 20 times larger than the Canadian one, the drug-makers figure—rightly—that it makes financial sense to sacrifice some foreign sales in order to prop up the high prices Americans now pay.

Still, reimportation proponents hope a plan that involves reimports from both Canada and Europe will ensure a broad enough supply to, in the long term, lower prices in the United States since Europe also keeps drug costs down with price controls. But, faced with a severe threat to their U.S. profits, companies might renegotiate foreign price controls. Reimportation supporters hope higher European prices will mean cheaper U.S. ones, but, because the United States has such a large share of the world drug market, "the [final] price is going to be much closer to current U.S. prices than existing foreign prices," according to Patricia Danzon, professor of health care and insurance at the Wharton School. Drug companies could also slightly tweak the formula of their biggest sellers so medications sold abroad aren't approved for sale in the United States. "Expect to see novel strategies that we wouldn't think of today" to keep U.S. prices elevated, says Alan Garber, director of Stanford's Center for Health Policy.

All this is compounded by the fact that the Europeans and Canadians themselves are increasingly less enthusiastic about price controls. A recent EU task force recommended several market-liberalization measures to rejuvenate a pharmaceutical industry that has lost tremendous market share to the United States recently. A U.S. reimportation scheme might be enough to make those reforms a reality. Long before cheap drugs make it to the United States, they could disappear in Europe.

In the long term, then, reimportation may be "a really pathetic way to deal with drug prices," as one Democratic House staffer put it. If the U.S. government really wants to reduce drug prices, it should allow large-scale purchasers—such as state health plans and Medicare—to bargain down prices, as Canada already does. Unfortunately, given the White House's alliance with the drug industry, this kind of bargaining may be one trend that never makes it south of Canada. ■

Moscow Dispatch

Robber Baron

BY GIDEON LICHFIELD

WHEN JOURNALISTS ASK Mikhail Khodorkovsky to explain how he made $8 billion in the decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, he usually admits that his methods bordered on the unethical—though not, he would insist, the illegal. But, he adds, he and his fellow Russian cutthroat capitalists are not so different from another group of industrialists in an emerging democracy: America's robber barons, men like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, or Leland Stanford, who laid the foundations of the world's biggest economy. In their day, Rockefeller and his peers were also considered ruthless and sleazy. Now, however, their names conjure up the universities, endowments, and respected corporations that have helped create America's strong legal system and envied business climate.

Since Khodorkovsky's politically motivated arrest this week by the Kremlin and his decision to step down from Yukos since then, some leading Russia-watchers have endorsed his self-conception. Bruce Jackson, president of the Project on Transitional Democracies, a leading organization focused on democratization in Eastern Europe, wrote in *The Washington Post* this week that Khodorkovsky's only crime was to be "a successful businessman who built the largest privately held company in Russia, ... converted his firm to Western business practices, ... [and] made the fatal mistake of expressing political opinions."

But Khodorkovsky isn't Rockefeller, and his corporation, Yukos, isn't Standard Oil. To be sure, Khodorkovsky wasn't arrested merely because the Russian government believes he committed tax evasion, embezzlement, and fraud. Vladimir Putin appears to be using the arrest to threaten politically connected oligarchs who refuse to submit to the Kremlin's authority. In fact, Russia experts warn that Putin, a former KGB functionary, is recreating an authoritarian state. But the fact that Khodorkovsky is being persecuted

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doesn't make him a benevolent reformer. The Yukos chief has made his money in a dubious way. Worse, he has meddled in politics in ways that potentially undermine Russia's fragile democratic institutions.

WHEN ROCKEFELLER DIED in 1937, according to *The Wealthy 100*, a book by Michael Klepper and Robert Gunther, he was worth $1.4 billion, around 1.5 percent of that year's U.S. GNP. Khodorkovsky's $8 billion—his worth before he was arrested and before the share price of Yukos went down the toilet this week—was around 2 percent of Russia's GDP this year. If Rockefeller's fortune were translated into today's dollars, he would be able to fund nearly one-tenth of the U.S. federal budget. Khodorkovsky, for his part, could have covered over one-eighth of his government's spending. Both, of course, were oilmen. At its height, Rockefeller's Standard Oil controlled three-quarters of the nation's oil industry. Khodorkovsky's Yukos, which is about to complete a merger with another oil firm, soon will produce just under one-third of Russia's oil, according to United Financial Group (UFG), a Moscow-based investment bank.

But, while Rockefeller built a fortune, Khodorkovsky grabbed one. Standard Oil began as a single refinery and grew with the country's nascent oil industry. Khodorkovsky and his pals, by contrast, bought a 78 percent stake in Yukos from the state in 1995. The auction was organized by Menatep, a bank linked to Khodorkovsky, which itself had grown out of a series of currency-exchange tricks possible only in the chaos of the Soviet Union's dying days. They had acquired a hugely valuable asset for next to nothing. Throughout the next few years, Khodorkovsky consolidated his grip on Yukos by technically and physically blocking shareholder access to meetings, diluting minority shareholders' stakes, and defaulting on loans.

And, while Rockefeller kept his money at home, thus boosting America's economic growth, Khodorkovsky has moved his wealth offshore. He and other Russian oligarchs have used a host of offshore companies, including the Gibraltar-based Menatep, to keep cash overseas. Though estimates vary greatly, at least $160 billion of Russian capital has fled the country since the end of the Soviet Union. Though this strategy may have made business sense to the oligarchs, in a developing country like Russia—with a weak banking system and where loans are rare—rich people's wealth is one of the only sources of investment. In fact, there were signs, before his arrest, that Khodorkovsky was planning to leave a good chunk of Yukos in foreign hands permanently: Yukos was reputed to be in talks with two foreign oil firms interested in buying stakes. "The final aim was to sell [Yukos] abroad," says Roland Nash of Renaissance Capital, another investment bank that specializes in Russia.

What's more, though Khodorkovsky gave endless interviews promoting democracy and free-market reform, his own interests came first. While nobody agrees on what exactly triggered the four-month-long series of Kremlin investigations that culminated in his arrest, many Moscow analysts think one of the key moments came in the early summer, when reforms to raise taxes on oil companies were going through parliament. The government had successfully increased its revenue up to then by lowering overall tax rates, which encouraged people to stop dodging taxes, and Yukos had paid its taxes up to this point. But, as UFG's Christopher Granville explains, the oil companies still utilized tax loopholes and offshore tax havens; ending these would boost state revenue, force the oil firms to repay some of the riches they had grabbed in the privatization, and strengthen the tax code. Yukos led the resistance to the tax reform. "The perception in the finance ministry as well as in the Kremlin is that Yukos lobbyists have been the main frustrators of government reforms on oil industry taxes," says Granville. In fact, Yukos planned to bolster its influence over future reforms by running several former and current Yukos employees in December's parliamentary elections.

In a young pseudo-democracy like Russia, such meddling threatens weak institutions. Most Russian opposition parties lack the grassroots base that opposition parties enjoy in developed nations. That makes them much more beholden to the corporate patrons who finance their campaigns, forestalling their potential development as independent, grassroots parties. Yukos's willingness to run candidates in parliamentary elections only strengthened this trend. In fact, some Russian officials have privately grumbled about Yukos "buying out the Duma," the Russian parliament.

And there is no sign that Khodorkovsky's political meddling stopped at oil. According to Eric Kraus of Sovlink, another investment house, Khodorkovsky may have already been indirectly controlling a good-sized stake in Gazprom, the state gas monopoly and the largest company in Russia. Influence over Gazprom—which is responsible for heating and (through the electricity company's power stations) lighting much of the country—would be a huge political as well as economic tool. A shareholder with a large stake in the company could exercise considerable control over the lives of ordinary Russians.

To top it all off, Khodorkovsky has talked of stepping down from Yukos in 2008, which happens to be the last year of Putin's final presidential term, and many around him talked of the oligarch running for a high position in the Russian government. In so doing, the upstart oilman would be taking a page from Silvio Berlusconi, who used his wealth to dominate politics, and, once in office, changed laws to help his corporate interests. True, Khodorkovsky would not be able to dominate the media the way Berlusconi has—the state has gained control of all the TV channels—but his money, his influence over the energy sector, and his inroads into the Duma could make him a powerful contender.

So Khodorkovsky is no Rockefeller. But, then, Russia is no United States. Khodorkovsky seized the opportunities

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the dissolution of the Soviet Union presented. Unfortunately for Russia, those opportunities—the result of chaos and the lack of transparent legal and political institutions—allowed tycoons to act more rapaciously than in the United States of a century ago. Worse, by keeping his money offshore and undermining political institutions, Khodorkovsky has done less than they did to improve the system he took advantage of.

Then again, so has Putin. While early twentieth-century America passed antitrust laws and broke the robber barons' monopolies by strengthening the regulatory system, Putin has done no such thing. Instead, he has dug up dirt on Khodorkovsky and pursued him, all the while ignoring other oligarchs who did not meddle in politics but whose business dealings may have been just as sleazy. In fact, Putin seems interested only in pushing Khodorkovsky out of the country, where he would no longer be a nuisance to the president. That may solve Putin's immediate problem, but it won't help Russia at all. ■

Najaf Dispatch

Golden Calf

BY HASSAN FATTAH

A CROWD OF boisterous, twentysomething men gathers every morning along a dusty alleyway, yards from the holy shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, the southern Iraqi city that historically has been a center of Shia Islam. They bang furiously on the crumbling gray door of a nondescript office, identified only by a handwritten sign that confirms that this is the "place for joining the Mahdi's Army," an armed force loyal to Moktada Al Sadr, the fiery young Shia cleric who constantly condemns the U.S. occupation. Many push their way through the crowd, eager to be the first inside the doors to gain a glimpse of Sadr. At 10 a.m., when Sadr's assistants open the doors, the crowd pours in, their adrenaline rising as if they were at a rock concert. "We are here to pay our respects, oh Sadr," they bellow. "We are all here to join the imam's army."

After leading the bellicose chanting for a few minutes, Sadr's men get down to business. And business is good. Sadr's assistants line up the crowd so each man can speak to the young cleric and give him a pledge of money. One by one, the men hand pledges to Sadr, who receives them and shares a few words. In just two hours, large sums of money pass through the office. And this is only one branch. The young cleric's organization, the Office of the Martyr Sadr, has opened up hundreds of small branches across Iraq, and at each one similar rituals take place every day--with Sadr's assistants standing in for the cleric.

Despite his rise to prominence in the wake of Saddam Hussein's fall, Sadr has remained a mystery to the American authorities in Iraq and many Western commentators. The 30-year-old son of a beloved Shia leader slain by Saddam in 1999 for opposing the dictator, Sadr has seemed to many in the United States the embodiment of the angry, religion-fueled, uncompromising cleric, a local version of the Ayatollah Khomeini. But, as the daily 10 a.m. ritual suggests, Sadr is motivated in part by a desire alien to Khomeini, who lived as a pauper: lucre. In fact, Sadr is building a moneymaking empire throughout Shia Iraq.

TRADING ON HIS martyred father's credentials, Sadr has raised the flags of Islam and Iraqi nationalism in a bid to boost his personal power. He has demanded that the United States leave Iraq, lambasted the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council as illegitimate, and even considered appointing his own shadow government to rule the country. (He temporarily shelved these plans several weeks ago.) Sadr's main line doesn't change much: Satanic America is no better than Saddam, is in Iraq to destroy Islam, and should get out. Worse, he has instigated confrontation after confrontation with American troops, resulting in firefights that have killed several Iraqis.

Sadr's actions have played well with Iraq's most disaffected people—poor young men, former soldiers, and even Baathists upset with moderate Shia leaders' willingness to tolerate the Americans. And, in July, Sadr capitalized on this disaffection by announcing the formation of the Mahdi's Army, a "peaceful army" intended to protect Islamic interests in Iraq. Sober estimates put Sadr's militia in the tens of thousands—enough to keep American soldiers up at night. In recent weeks, the Mahdi's Army has been seen marching in formation around Najaf and Baghdad.

But hatred of the United States is not the only reason Sadr has formed his army or harassed the Iraqi Governing Council. Sadr also stirs up trouble because he wants to amass great wealth. In fact, shortly after Saddam fell, Sadr actually sanctioned the looting of Iraq's institutions—at a time when other clerics were telling the populace to restrain itself and restore civil order. Sadr encouraged his men to amass huge fortunes and build a massive pile of goods from which to expand their network of offices. In a matter of weeks, billions of dollars' worth of equipment, furniture, and cars were carted out of ministry buildings in Baghdad. Sadr's men wound up with a significant share of this loot, including a considerable cache of arms, which have given them leverage in turf wars. Sadr "may have no legitimacy, but he has power because of his following," says Sadoun Dulame, an Iraqi political scientist. Indeed, while his devotees dwell in poverty in slums—such as Baghdad's

Hassan Fattah is a frequent TNR *contributor based in Baghdad.*

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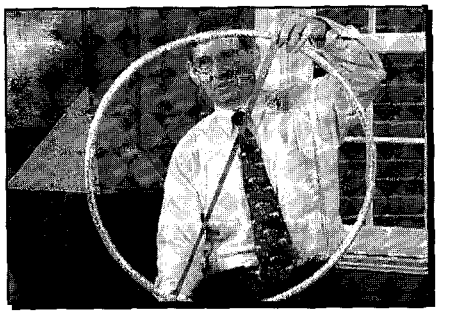

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Sadr City (named for Moktada's father), where nearly two million poor Shia live—Sadr's men have been amassing a war chest of riches.

Since the looting, Sadr has expanded his moneymaking activities. In Najaf, his organization has gone after the booming religious-tourism business, trying to corner the market on Shia pilgrims who have poured into the city from Iran, Syria, the Gulf, and Pakistan. At some $250 to $350 per visit, the tourists are one of the biggest gold mines for Sadr's group. With his network of offices, the arms he has obtained from the looting, and his connections to Iran, Sadr's aides say he has quickly pushed other Islamic tour operators out of business. (When I visited Sadr's organization in Najaf last month, his aides spoke with me; Sadr was nearby but did not speak, only nodding in assent at some of his aides' points.)

Most important, Sadr has used his army to fight for control of Shiism's most important mosques. Sadr battled over the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf with the late Ayatollah Mohammad Bakr Al Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, who used to give Friday sermons there. Since Hakim was killed in a massive bombing outside the mosque in August, Sadr's men have gradually consolidated their position in town, while keeping Hakim's troops, the Badr Brigade, at bay. Sadr's men now control the Kufa Mosque, a subsidiary mosque in Najaf, and are battling for the reins of Imam Ali and other top mosques.

In gaining control of these mosques, Sadr wins access to an even greater source of revenue, as many mosque-goers tithe large sums of money to senior clerics. In fact, observers estimate that the Imam Ali Mosque tithes alone are worth millions of dollars per year. When they win over a mosque, Sadr's men get a huge share of the wealth from these tithes. And, last week, Sadr's men entered another holy city, Karbala. In June, notes Juan Cole, a Shiism expert at the University of Michigan, Sadr agreed to share control of Karbala's mosques with Ayatollah Ali Sistani, a leading older cleric. But, in recent weeks, motivated in part by a vision of tithes from Karbala mosques, Sadr went back on his agreement and has tried to take over all of Karbala's religious institutions. In the city, Sadr's men have fought pitched battles with the troops of Sistani for control of Karbala shrines, which also contain tithe money worth millions. Abdulmahdi Al Karbalai, a Sistani aide, says, "There were clearly some sides who wanted to take control of the money. ... The money is sitting in a bank account, and I can assure you it's a large sum." Last month, Sadr and Sistani loyalists fired rifles and rocket-propelled grenades at each other. By Sunday, at least 23 people had been killed in the Karbala fighting.

Sadr even wants to control central government funds. Though Sistani has called for an eventual Iraqi government to take control of property seized from looters, Sadr disagrees. He insists that poor Iraqis should take control of these recovered looted goods and distribute them "to the needy" themselves, skimming a cut for Sadr's group.

SO FAR, THE American occupiers have danced around Sadr, generally avoiding dealing with him. The Iraqi Governing Council, for its part, has attempted to get an arrest warrant for him but has reportedly been unable to budge the coalition into acting on it, because the United States apparently fears the Shia public's response if it were to arrest Sadr.

But the coalition and the Iraqi Governing Council are ignoring another potential tack: buying Sadr off. In fact, an Iraqi analyst suspects that Sadr would tone down or even end his anti-occupation activities if he were given a lucrative share in reconstruction contracts and more formal recognition of his power. In fact, his men have been asking for a larger role in running the finances of Baghdad reconstruction contracts in areas they control, such as Sadr City. And, in August, when a U.S. helicopter ripped down some of his banners in Sadr City, the coalition apologized, and Sadr quickly called off his men. Sadr "wants a position," says one Iraqi analyst knowledgeable about the young cleric. "They allowed [Hakim's] Badr Brigades to have some power, and now he wants some, too." ■

Joe Trippi reinvents campaigning.

Organization Man

BY NOAM SCHEIBER

EVERYONE TELLS THEIR own version of how Walter Mondale won the straw poll at Iowa's Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner in 1983, but they all go something like this: In early October, a young Mondale aide named Joe Trippi shows up in Des Moines to check on Mondale's Iowa field operation. What he finds there horrifies him. Somehow the Iowa team has allowed the rival campaign of California Senator Alan Cranston to nearly corner the market on tickets to the JJ dinner, an annual affair designed to raise money for the Iowa state Democratic Party. This is, to colossally understate things, a problem. The dinner's traditional straw poll is an important barometer of public opinion in the state that hosts the nation's first caucuses. Mondale is a former vice president from neighboring Minnesota. Not only is he expected to win the straw poll; he is expected to win big. But the way you win is by packing the convention hall full of your own supporters. And the way you do that is by selling them tickets or buying tickets for them.

Trippi is nearly hysterical when he calls Campaign Manager Bob Beckel and Deputy Manager Mike Ford in Wash-

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ington. "He speaks so fast, it was hard to keep up," Beckel recalls. "I said, 'Joe, What's the bottom line? What do you need?' He said, 'I just need permission to do whatever I need to do.' ... I just said OK." But there isn't a lot Trippi *can* do. He can try to get the Iowa Democratic Party to sell him more tickets. But there's no way they're going to sell him $275,000 worth, which is what Trippi estimates Cranston has bought. And, even if they would, there's no way he can afford to drop that kind of cash on an off-year event. When it comes down to it, Trippi is going to have to get his hands on tickets that have already been sold. Cranston tickets. Lots of them. And yet, once he accepts that proposition, the solution is almost elegant in its simplicity: What's to stop him from just marching right up to Cranston's people and *asking* for them?

"We started really early in the day," Trippi remembers, reflecting on how he and an Iowa colleague named Tom Cosgrove solved their JJ problem. "They stopped about three miles out [from] the staging area—the Mondale buses coming from Minnesota or wherever they were coming from." What follows is one of the most ambitious political makeovers in history. A team of Mondale aides, led by Cosgrove, plasters the bus with Cranston paraphernalia—stickers, posters, buttons, everything. Three miles down the road, the bus pulls up to the Cranston tent, where a Mondale/Cranston supporter gets out and tells a real Cranston aide he has 52 people on the bus. The aide looks up at the bus, surely admiring the military-like discipline that has brought a busload of Cranston supporters from "Los Angeles or wherever" out to the middle of Iowa this early in the day, and quietly congratulates himself. He promptly hands over 52 tickets.

And it continues like this, through bus after bus of Mondale supporters: Stop three miles up the highway, lather the bus in Cranston paraphernalia, drive on to the Cranston tent, claim your tickets. And the Cranston campaign just keeps forking them over. Happily. Hell, the more buses that show up, the more impressed the Cranston people are by their own handiwork. Never does it occur to them that these busloads of supporters aren't the genuine article. At least not until the real Cranston buses start showing up. "Twenty buses pull up, and they're out of tickets," Trippi says, still amused at the spectacle almost 20 years later. "More Cranston buses keep pulling up, and they don't have the tickets anymore." Score one for Walter Mondale.

JOE TRIPPI HAS been called a lot of things during the eight months he has been managing Howard Dean's campaign for president. To rival campaigns, he's an overgrown computer geek, playing around on blogs and chat rooms until all hours of the night. To the most die-hard Dean supporters, he's an almost messianic figure, the man who helped catapult an obscure Vermont governor to the front of the Democratic pack. And, to the press, Trippi is the kind of uninhibited quote machine most reporters drool over—tossing off quips that are part campaign insider, part pundit, and part pure bravado.

There's some truth to all these claims. But Trippi is first and foremost an organizer—a man who has spent much of his career making sure the right number of bodies turn up on Election Day. "That's the way [organizers] think," says Beckel. "They think about moving votes. In his case, where do you find [the votes]? Who are they? Where do they stand? If they're with us, get them; if they're not with us, forget about them. If they're undecided, badger the hell out of them." And for good reason: In the Democratic primaries, where turnout is extremely low, the better-organized campaign almost always wins.

Of course, Dean's rivals realize this as well. Their campaigns are all staffed by seasoned veterans who collectively have been through dozens of primary contests. What these rivals didn't realize at the onset of the 2004 campaign is that the Internet is the ultimate organizing tool. In fact, the reason they're all now staring up at the bottom of Dean's shoes is that *no* political operative had ever realized it before Joe Trippi came along.

TRIPPI WAS 24 when he joined his first presidential campaign, as an organizer for Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy in the 1980 Arizona precinct caucuses. The challenge facing Kennedy in Arizona was that the Democratic establishment in the state—as in most states—was behind the incumbent, Jimmy Carter. And, while there were large pockets of Kennedy support, primarily in the state's poorer Hispanic communities and on its Indian reservations, the Carter-friendly establishment had arrayed the polling places so that they would be nearly impossible for Kennedy-backers to get to. "What they had done is they had only nineteen polling places," Trippi recalls. "And they were put as far away from the minority community and [Indian] reservations as they could put them."

Trippi was already a veteran of multiple organizing efforts in his native California. That experience paid dividends when California Governor Jerry Brown decided not to challenge Carter for the Democratic nomination. Brown, a longtime supporter of Cesar Chavez's farmworkers union, would have instantly had the farm workers' backing in Arizona had he entered the race. His decision not to run created an opening for Trippi who, on the strength of his relationship with Cesar's son Fernando, helped convince the farm workers to mobilize their shock troops for Kennedy. "They came in like a SWAT team in Arizona," says one Kennedy campaign official. "In the [Latino] community, the farm workers are tremendous heroes. They had enormous credibility." On Election Day, Trippi and the farm workers went up and down the so-called Phoenix-Tucson corridor, a population hub in the southcentral part of the state, piling voters into rented vans and shuttling them to polling places. "These nineteen polling places had lines for hours," Trippi remembers. Kennedy won Arizona by ten points.

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After Arizona, Trippi loaded his most loyal lieutenants into his ailing, gold Pinto and drove nonstop for nearly 1,000 miles to Austin, where Bill Carrick was running Kennedy's Texas operation. Texas was the next major Southwestern primary state on the calendar, and Carrick was adamant that he already had it fully staffed. But Trippi, undeterred, pointed to a splotch on the map in the northeastern part of the state and asked if it was available. "Well, we're still working on that," Carrick shot back, trying to suppress a guffaw. Trippi had stumbled onto the single most conservative, pro-Carter area in the state: Dallas–Fort Worth.

At the time, Texas had one of the more convoluted methods of allocating its delegates to the Democratic National Convention. Once every four years, voters would show up for what looked like a typical primary—the wrinkle being that the primary didn't count for anything. To actually win delegates, you had to make sure your supporters turned out for the state's caucuses, which took place at eight o'clock the same evening. The catch was that you couldn't attend the caucuses without having voted in the primary, since it was your primary stub that got you in the door. It was, in short, a nightmare for political organizers.

Trippi figured Carter supporters outnumbered Kennedy supporters in the Dallas area by something like four to one. At that rate, there probably weren't enough Kennedy partisans in all of East Texas to make a Dallas win likely. But, in principle, it didn't really matter. Because all you really had to do to win delegates was to get enough of your voters to attend the caucuses. Of course, to this point, no one had quite figured out how to do that. "Headquarters had us doing this weird thing where you call people up and say, 'Who are you [supporting] for president?' " Trippi recalls. "If they say, 'I'm for Ted Kennedy,' you say, 'Great, make sure you vote.' Then, after they said OK, you said, 'Now, you're going to get this sticker, you're going to have to wear it, you're going to have to go to Charlie's house . . . .' And we weren't getting through. People were just hanging up on us."

A couple of hundred phone calls in, it occurred to Trippi that it would save everybody a lot of time and aggravation if there were some way to get your supporters to come to you rather than seeking them out yourself. Trippi thought about it a little more, and pretty soon he had an idea: What if, come Election Day, you set up a little lemonade stand with a sign that read KENNEDY SUPPORTERS: FREE LEMONADE HERE outside every Dallas-area polling station? On the one hand, no one in his right mind was going to pass up free, cold lemonade in 100-degree heat. On the other hand, Carter supporters weren't exactly in their right minds. They were, in fact, exactly the kind of people who'd deprive themselves just to spite Kennedy, even if it was 100 degrees out. Which was exactly the idea. Because, once you were sure you had your own people throwing back free glasses of lemonade, you could make your case. As Trippi explains it, "You'd say, 'See that stub you got? Let me tell you what's going on. They've been hoodwinkin' you, dude. This thing that you just went through? It's bullshit. It's a beauty contest. Eight o'clock tonight is where [the real event is].' " It was that easy.

Carrick, needless to say, wasn't pleased to learn that the fate of his Dallas operation lay in the hands of a couple-dozen hastily assembled lemonade stands. And, when Trippi tried to circumvent him by calling national political director Karl Wagner in Washington, Wagner cut him off before he could get a word out: "Joe, you're not doing the lemonade stands." So, according to Trippi, "I hung up the phone and walked into my staff and said, 'OK, don't tell anybody, but we're doing lemonade stands.' " The results spoke for themselves. The Kennedy campaign won most of the national delegates in the Dallas area and got wiped out just about everywhere else in the state. "It was very effective," Carrick concedes.

IT'S NOT MUCH of an overstatement to say that political organizing didn't change a whole lot between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1960s. As early as 1840, according to Daniel Shea, a professor of political science at Allegheny College and author of *Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management*, voters were organized in two phases: The weekend before an election, party activists would go door-to-door or drop leaflets in supporters' neighborhoods, reminding them of the upcoming vote. Then, on Election Day, the party would place a representative at each polling site to record the name of every voter who showed up. Every so often throughout the day, a runner would grab the list and take it back to the local headquarters, where the names would be checked off a master registration list maintained by the party. The people whose names remained on the master list by the middle of the afternoon would receive a visit from an activist or, in later years, a phone call urging them to get to the polls.

Partisan affiliation began to decline in the '60s, creating a new class of swing voters and a new problem for political parties. When the universe of a candidate's supporters overlapped almost entirely with the universe of party members, as it had for the previous hundred years, winning elections was mostly a function of turning out the vote. Now the parties had to spend time and resources winning over unaligned voters—even members inclined to vote for the other side. Demographic characteristics that correlated with voting behavior—such as age, income level, and gender—suddenly became important.

Still, up until the late '90s, parties and campaigns tried to determine who would vote for them by looking primarily at who had shown up for the previous election. As a first cut, this was a reasonable way to go about things. The problem was that the method didn't account for important nuances—such as newly registered voters, people who usually vote but just happened to miss the previous election, people who are registered one way but tend to vote the

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other—which would make the get-out-the-vote effort even more efficient.

That's where information technology (I.T.) has had a significant impact in the past few years. Using ever more detailed data, a computer can tell you exactly how much certain demographic characteristics increase a person's likelihood of voting—and of voting a certain way. Suppose, completely arbitrarily, that affluent, middle-aged, white females only show up for every other election, but they favor Democrats 90 percent of the time when they do vote. If you're a Democratic candidate, you probably want to make a special effort to get this group to the polls.

Of course, focusing your efforts in this way may only get you a couple of percentage points on Election Day. (Hal Malchow, a direct-mail specialist who worked for Al Gore's presidential campaign in 2000, estimates that a similar kind of targeting improves the efficiency of a campaign mailing by between 10 and 30 percent.) But, in a close race, a couple of percentage points may be the difference between winning and losing.

It's helpful to think about these developments in terms of what you might call "cost per body"—that is, the total amount you end up spending to bring a single supporter to the polls. If resources were unlimited, no one would care about the cost per body. You could just send a campaign worker to every house in, say, Iowa, identify your supporters, and drag them to the voting booth. But resources *are* limited. Which means that, among candidates with similarly appealing platforms and equal amounts of money, the one with the lowest cost per body wins. I.T. is a way for campaigns to lower that cost, if only marginally.

And yet, even though campaigns are organizing supporters more efficiently than ever before, they're still using the same basic techniques they've been using for 35—and in many cases 150—years. Donna Brazile, who managed the Gore campaign, recalls that her single most important concern at this point in 1999 was the campaign's Iowa hard count—i.e., the number of people who have committed to supporting your candidate in the upcoming election. "It's a standard recipe," Brazile explains: The campaign buys a list of registered voters and past caucusgoers from the state party just before it opens for business. At that point, you start making phone calls. The people who say they're definitely supporting your candidate are assigned a "one." The people who say they're leaning your way get a "two." And the people who say they're for the other guy get a "three." Your job is to convert all your twos to ones and to keep your ones from sliding. The number of ones you have at any given time is your hard count. Let it fall too low, and you can kiss the election goodbye.

Which is to say, with the possible exception of Trippi's lemonade stands, no innovation introduced in the 160 years between 1840 and 2000 had changed the basic economics of organizing: As long as you still had to go out and identify your supporters and drag them to the polls, it still cost you a ton of money for every vote you won.

TRIPPI HAS ALWAYS been a self-described technophile. He spent three years at San Jose State University majoring in aerospace engineering. Beckel remembers doing a panel discussion with him not long after the 1984 campaign, when Trippi was already talking about an early version of the Internet and how it could change politics. "I said, 'Joe, I don't have any idea what you're talking about,'" Beckel recalls. Meanwhile, though Trippi's profile in the small world of political operatives continued to grow with each successive presidential campaign—Mondale in the 1984 election cycle, Gary Hart and then Dick Gephardt in the 1988 cycle—he'd begun to sour on the life of the political operative. The constant plotting and scheming of a presidential campaign had started to wear on him, as had the growing importance of money in politics and the implosion of the Hart campaign over something as seemingly irrelevant as Donna Rice. So it wasn't entirely surprising that the late '90s found Trippi entrenched in Silicon Valley instead—investing in tech start-ups, sitting on boards of directors, and doing corporate consulting on the side.

One of those start-ups was a little-known firm called Wave Systems, whose products secure information—like credit card numbers—used in online transactions. But more important than the technology was the investor community Wave created. Starting in about 1997, the company set up a chat board for Wave investors interested in exchanging ideas with one another. Pretty soon the site was attracting hundreds of posts per day from so-called "Wavoids"—at all hours of the night. What kept them coming back was the fact that Wave executives were actually reading what the investors wrote. "They had this constituency," says Jason Barkeloo, a Ph.D. student living in Ohio who invested in the company early on and remains a frequent poster on the company's message board. "The people involved in this community were doctors, neurosurgeons, psychiatrists, professors. ... I'd come home at four, five in afternoon, and I'd be online doing research 'til two in the morning."

Joe Trippi—username "random1"—was also a Wavoid. "Snackman, Bigtim, EcommerceMan—I can tell you everything about that community," he says. Trippi had begun investing in Wave and posting on its chat board in 1999. Although he was intrigued by the kind of community Wave had built, within a couple months it became obvious that the company wasn't doing as good a job as it could of interacting with investors. "They had a really tough time communicating in English what it is they do," Trippi recalls. So Trippi sent an e-mail directly to Wave CEO Steven Sprague and his father, Peter, the company's chairman. "I said, 'I think you guys are screwing up. You're not communicating things right. ... Here's why and how and everything.'"

A month later, Trippi was on the company payroll—a move that, according to Barkeloo, was like catnip to the Wavoids. "When Joe came on board, through the community there was an air of, 'One of us now is on the inside.' Joe,

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as far as I know, was the bridge between the community and the company." Sprague estimates that, before long, Wave's investors were generating 1,000 and 1,500 posts per day, something basically unheard of in the corporate world. "I don't think there's anyone that will tell you there's anything like it," Trippi says.

Beyond its size, two things stood out about the Wave community. The first was the emotional investment the shareholders were making thanks to their interaction with each other and the company's management—an investment that produced incredible loyalty. "I think that the individual retail investor, no doubt about it, kept Wave afloat," says Barkeloo. "The loyal following kept the stock price up. The company should have gone away [when the tech bubble burst], but it didn't because of the retail base." The second thing was the *way* the investment community expanded. "It was word of mouth, grassroots," Sprague explains. "A buddy calls you up and says, 'Ah, I have a great stock.' You say, 'Where can I learn more?' He says, 'Join the chat board.' "

TRIPPI IS OFTEN credited with bringing the Dean campaign into the information age. In fact, it's the other way around: It was Dean's rapidly growing Internet support that made it necessary to bring Trippi into the campaign. The turning point was the winter meeting of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in February, where Dean offered a full-throated denunciation of the drive to war in Iraq and accused his party of failing to stand up to the president. Dean had been receiving a healthy 50 e-mails per day prior to the speech, but suddenly the messages were pouring in. "After the DNC speech, [the e-mails] went up geometrically," says Rick Ridder, Trippi's immediate predecessor as campaign manager. "It was close to five hundred a day."

One of Trippi's first acts on behalf of the Dean campaign (he was a consultant at the time) was to negotiate a contract with Meetup.com—an online service that helps people with common interests find one another and plan local gatherings. In early January, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, Meetup decided to test the market for political gatherings by inviting users to sign up for a "Meetup" with John Edwards, John Kerry, or Howard Dean. Four hundred people signed up for the Dean Meetup on the first day alone, leading a young Meetup employee named William Finkel to suggest to his boss, CEO Scott Heiferman, that the two seek out Trippi and establish a formal business relationship. "I was going to D.C. for a business meeting at AOL," says Heiferman. "William said, 'Hey, let's go see this guy Joe Trippi.' I said, 'Who the hell's Joe Trippi?' He said, 'He's working on the Dean campaign.' I said, 'Who the hell's Howard Dean?' "

But Heiferman met Trippi, and 40 minutes later the future Dean campaign manager had seen something he hadn't seen for almost 25 years. The beauty of the Meetups, like the beauty of the lemonade stands he'd set up for Ted Kennedy in 1980, was that your supporters *came to you*. And that meant that the cost per body fell dramatically. Or, more precisely, to some fraction of $2,500. That's the price Trippi agreed to pay Meetup for the information Dean supporters entered when they signed up for Dean gatherings.

Meetup figured perfectly into Trippi's grand campaign strategy. He reasoned that Dean's antiwar, anti-Bush message would resonate at the grassroots, meaning Dean could raise impressive amounts of money from a large base of small donors. That's what had happened in 1992, when Trippi's client, Jerry Brown, promised not to accept donations larger than $100 for his presidential campaign. "I had the same concern everyone else did," Trippi recalls. " 'A hundred dollars? Do you know how many hundred-dollar checks you've got to raise to compete with Bill Clinton and these other guys?' " But the response among contributors was quick—and overwhelming. The campaign raised $5 million, helping Brown win the Connecticut and Colorado primaries and come within a hair's breadth of winning New York. But the way the campaign came to collect so much money in such small amounts was even more significant: the first known use of an 800 number to solicit feedback from supporters, making the campaign interactive.

Trippi believed he could repeat that success using a twenty-first-century update of his earlier methods—not only to raise money but to build the kind of community he'd seen evolve at Wave Systems, which could do a lot of the heavy organizational lifting for him. In addition to the Meetups, he created a Web log, where supporters could post their thoughts and get feedback from the campaign. The hope was that each person who attended a Dean Meetup or who wrote regularly on the Dean blog would turn around and involve several more people—siblings, parents, friends, business associates—all of whom could be put to work for the campaign. (On July 2, for example, Dean Meetup-goers wrote letters to every undecided voter in Iowa.) Trippi would eventually hire a Web staff of some ten people to write everything from computer code to blog content.

BEFORE LONG, TRIPPI puts together a PowerPoint presentation explaining how he's going to use the Internet to attract cash and sign up supporters—which he dutifully takes around to meetings with labor leaders, congressmen, fund-raisers, and other members of the Democratic establishment. But, of course, at the time the campaign has a measly 8,000 people signed up on its website. To say, as Trippi does, that Dean is going to have 150,000 people signed up by June and 450,000 by September, and that it's going to lap the field in fund-raising—well, the average Democratic suit just has no idea what to do with that. "You have one hundred fifty-seven thousand bucks in the bank, and everyone just saw your FEC report," Trippi says. "Everybody I gave the presentation to looked at me like I was from Mars and probably on massive quantities of hallucinogenic drugs."

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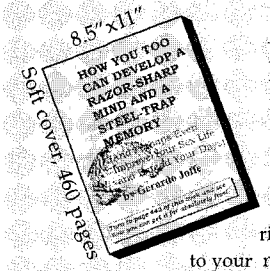

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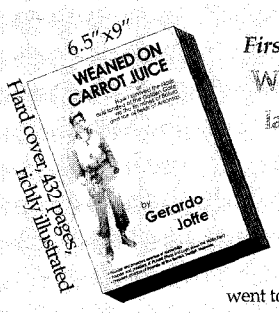

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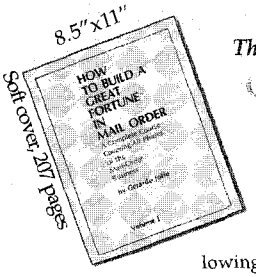

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That's February. In March, something happens. According to Heiferman, the average pre-Dean Meetup size was between eight and 16 people—"a dozen knitters here, fifteen Harry Potter fans there." But, as Dean's March Meetup rolls around, Heiferman notices that there are 250 people signed up for a single location in New York—just one of hundreds of Dean Meetups set to take place across the country on the same day. Heiferman decides to check it out for himself and can barely believe his eyes. "There's that moment of seeing what turned out to be five hundred people packed into this place," he remembers, still not entirely convinced he saw what he thinks he saw. Then, in late March, something else happens. Trippi looks at his website and sees that he's now got 22,000 e-mail addresses. He thinks to himself, why not ask people to help make one big fund-raising push in the last week of the quarter? The results blow him away: 10,000 individual contributors; nearly $500,000 in six days.

A month passes, and it's more of the same: More e-mail addresses, more people at the Meetups, more money rolling in. Another month, and another, and it just keeps growing. Now it's late June, and Trippi is sure he's not on massive quantities of hallucinogenic drugs—or, if he is, the rest of the world is, too. He packs up the PowerPoint presentation and goes back to see the Democratic suits. "You saw me talk to you before," Trippi would say. "Let me explain this to you." And Trippi lays out the numbers. Back in February, he'd promised that 150,000 people would sign up on the website by the end of June. There are actually 159,000. Ears perk up. And then Trippi starts speaking the suits' language. "I just hand them a slip of paper that says 2.6 million dollars on it, or whatever it was that day. I'd say, 'That's how much money we've raised this quarter. We're ten days away from the end of quarter.'" And then he'd close the deal. "You know how you're going to know this [campaign] is true? Keep this. Whatever you read in the newspaper about what we do in this quarter, remember that it happened after this amount." And the suits just stare blankly at their slips of paper—$2.6 million, or $2.4 million, or $3.1 million—whatever it happens to be that day. And now they're not so sure. What if this guy is for real?

Come early July, the suits are sitting down to read those newspapers Trippi told them to read, and the newspapers all say that Dean has raised $7.6 million. The suits look at their slips of paper—with $2.6 million, or 2.4, or 3.1, or whatever—and they look back at the newspaper, and it just doesn't make any sense. That's when Trippi's phone starts ringing. All at once the suits are calling. They want another look at that PowerPoint presentation. "Now, no one was doing 'Geez, you're crazy,' anymore," Trippi says. "They were just going like, 'Oh shit.'" Suddenly, it's dawning on the suits that, if you can go from $2.6 to $7.6 million in ten days, and if you can go from 22,000 to 159,000 people in three months, then those 450,000 people Trippi promised by the end of September just might materialize. And, if those 450,000 people Trippi promised materialized, who knew how much money they might bring with them?

But, in truth, the suits are only grasping the tip of the iceberg. Because the money is incidental—a by-product, really. Far more important is that Trippi is racking up a hard count most campaign operatives could only dream of—and without having to make a single phone call, knock on a single door, or send a single piece of direct mail. Every time the suits have heard about the Internet changing politics over the last ten years, their eyes have glazed over. And for good reason. Up until Howard Dean and Joe Trippi came along, the only thing I.T. had done was marginally lower the cost of doing the same things they'd always done. And it wasn't even clear it did that. But Trippi is doing something radically different. Like all those fanatical Wave Systems investors, the Dean supporters are doing the hard work of organizing *for him*, which means the cost per body is falling like mad. Come to think of it, the campaign is even *making money* in the process.

TRIPPI IS AN olive-skinned man with large, bulbous features—bulging eyes, prominent lips, meaty ears—a middle-aged paunch, and a slightly balding, salt-and-pepper pate. When he's not out roaming among aides, he's usually leaning back deep in his chair, feet propped up on the edge of the folding table that serves as his desk, grasping at a can of Diet Pepsi or one of the handful of gadgets that litter his office. Halfway through our conversation I ask how big a deal it is to have stumbled onto a way to get supporters to do part of your job for you. Trippi waves me around to his side of the table and directs me to a portion of the Dean website called "Deanlink," which tracks the number of additional supporters each current Dean-backer is bringing in. "Here's Jonathan Kreiss Tompkins," Trippi says, pointing to a picture on the screen of his laptop. Jonathan Kreiss Tompkins lives in Alaska and, it turns out, has single-handedly signed up 463 other Dean supporters—their names go on for screen after screen down the left side of Jonathan's Deanlink page. "What I'm trying to say is ... all these people have linked themselves to this guy—and it keeps going, dude." Trippi pauses and looks up. "Now here's the really cool thing: Jonathan Kreiss Tompkins is fourteen years old."

What Trippi doesn't say is that, if you find yourself enough Jonathan Kreiss Tompkinses, pretty soon you've won yourself the nomination. (This is something even the supposedly Internet-savvy campaign of General Wesley Clark doesn't seem to understand.) After all, there are about 100,000 Democrats who typically vote in the Iowa caucuses out of about 500,000 registered in the state. In the average presidential year, you can assure yourself of a win if you get your hard count up to about 30,000. In a year when there are nine candidates, the hard count you need to ensure victory is even lower. Now extend the logic: If, as the DNC assumes, there are about 50 million registered Democrats in the country, and the same percentage of Democrats show up at the polls on primary day around the

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country as they do in Iowa, then no more than ten million people are likely to vote in all. Which means that, assuming your supporters are distributed the right way, you probably don't need a national hard count of more than one or two million to assure yourself the nomination.

Mention this theory to Trippi, and he cites Washington state—a place, it's probably safe to say, that none of the other campaigns are even thinking about at this point. "In Washington state, God help any of the other candidates," he says. "We have such an organization up there." According to Trippi, somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 people have historically turned out for the state's presidential caucuses. This past August, 15,000 people turned out to see Dean stop by a Seattle Meetup during his "Sleepless Summer Tour." "I'm standing there going like, 'Shit, we'd win the caucus today,' " Trippi recalls. " 'We'd win the statewide caucus with how many people are standing here.' " And even that probably understates Dean's grassroots support: Seattle was just one of more than 20 Meetups across Washington state that day.

Of course, a skeptic might say that, just because you have 15,000 people show up for a Meetup, or 250,000 people giving you money, or 500,000 people giving you their e-mail addresses and reading your blog, doesn't necessarily mean that all 15,000 or 250,000 or 500,000 are going to show up on Election Day. And, if that's the case, the skeptic would probably continue, then the two million e-mail addresses Trippi says he's building toward don't mean a whole lot. But, then, this skeptic has probably never worked for Wave Systems or, for that matter, the presidential campaign of Jerry Brown. If he had, he probably would have learned that, when you're raising money from people in small increments, and when those same people think they're being listened to, then those people start to feel like they own the campaign. And, once they start to feel they own the campaign, it's almost impossible to pry them away. In the language of political organizing, you never have to worry about your ones backsliding into twos.

Trippi gets a perfect test of this proposition in late June, right in the middle of the $7.6 million push. Dean goes on NBC's "Meet the Press" and, according to just about every pundit in Washington, falls flat on his face. But the average Dean supporter doesn't quite see it that way. He sees the same candor and forthrightness that won him over in the first place. And, truth be told, he thinks Tim Russert is a bit of an asshole—constantly trying to trap Dean in contradictions and hypocrisies. Furthermore, he's annoyed at how dismissive the media is when it comes to a campaign that, after all, he partly owns. Pretty soon, he's writing e-mails and ponying up more cash, trying to send a message to the people who would tread on his investment.

"Well, let's see," Trippi says when I suggest that his supporters might not show up when it counts. "They can go to a frickin' meeting once a month, but they aren't going to make it to a caucus, which is—what's that—a meeting once every four years?"

THE BAD NEWS if you happen to be a Democratic partisan intent on beating George W. Bush is that there's no obvious way to organize yourself to a general-election victory. Unlike the primary, where the goal is to win over one or two million hard-core partisans, winning a general election requires something on the order of 50 million votes—many from the vast political center. Take the most successful Internet operation in history, raise it an order of magnitude, and still you don't come anywhere near the number of votes you need.

And that's under ordinary circumstances. The problem grows considerably worse when you consider that your opponent is a president who plans to raise some $200 million and who has spent four years courting his own conservative base. The combination of the two means Bush is likely to have both the money and the political latitude to woo the millions of swing voters he needs to cement his reelection.

Still, there is hope. Trippi and Dean are now hard at work locking up the more traditional elements of the Democratic base. (Dean is widely expected to receive the endorsement of the 1.6 million–member Service Employees International Union this week.) Between Dean's Internet operation and the manpower of big labor and various women's and civil rights groups, a nominee Dean might even surpass the turnout operation that put Gore over the top in several states—Delaware, Washington, Wisconsin, Michigan—where he was running even with Bush or trailing in the final days of the 2000 campaign. "It's not like I just fell off the turnip truck, and I'm an Internet guy, and all I know how to do is the Internet," Trippi says. "Trust me. We're going to reach African Americans. We know how to do that."

And, of course, there is the money. If Dean becomes the Democratic nominee, his Internet fund-raising ability will once again be a crucial factor in his chances of success. "This is like in January, and we're sitting there, and we finally realize it's going to take two million Americans each giving us one hundred dollars online" to raise as much money as Bush, Trippi says. "There's only one medium ... that can change things enough that, if two million people tomorrow morning just woke up and thought, here's your one hundred dollars, it could happen in a day." Surely someone somewhere in the White House has had the exact same thought. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Up to Date

MODERNISM, EVER SINCE it began, has evoked a kind of chic in some critics and, through them, some of the public; and postmodernism has only increased it. Let the artist do anything unconventional in his art, then present it forcefully, and there will probably be at least a few critics who will not want to seem stuffy and will praise it. Some of the public will follow. This itch to be in on the new, to be au courant, I call the Hanslick syndrome. In nineteenth-century Vienna, there was an eminent music critic named Eduard Hanslick who had one blind spot: the new music of Wagner. (Wagner caricatured him as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*.) His adverse view of Wagner engulfed Hanslick in history; now his good work is largely forgotten, and he is remembered only as a critic who was deaf to Wagner. Ever since Hanslick, it seems, there have been critics so worried about sharing his fate that they praise almost anything new and different—if the artist presents it with sufficient disdain for those who do not appreciate it.

ELEPHANT
(HBO/Fine Line)

Here in the film world is Gus Van Sant, attracting anti-Hanslicks of our day. Van Sant eases matters for them by varying his avant output with accessible work—*Good Will Hunting* and *Finding Forrester*, for instance—but those films seem to be only the means to finance his real interests, such pictures as *My Own Private Idaho* and *Gerry*, large vessels brimful of nothing. Now comes **ELEPHANT**, laureled at Cannes and celebrated here.

The title has nothing to do directly with the film. Van Sant, it seems, picked it up from a French short where it signified a looming intrusion in an unlikely place. The place here is an ultra-modern American high school in a quiet town, and the intrusion is a variant of the Columbine horror—the frolicsome killing by two high school students of fellow students and teachers.

In Michael Moore's recent documentary *Bowling for Columbine*, the slaughter was treated in a possessive and slightly smug way, but at least there was some attempt at understanding. Van Sant, very consciously a superior being who need not bother with such kitsch as understanding and motive, spends the first two-thirds of his film with a number of students who are just going about their business. Not all of them even have the special pathos of becoming victims. The film opens with John, one of the students, taking over the wheel of the family car because his father is apparently hopped up. This, we may think, is the beginning of a story, but Van Sant is above such trivia. The father virtually disappears from the film; John goes to school, and on his way out passes two students headed in, dressed in combat fatigues and carrying weapon bags. John asks them what's going on, and they tell him to get lost. He leaves. Most of the rest of the picture is a flashback—what happens in the school on that day before the massacre.

What happens is nothing. We spend large chunks of time following individual students or small groups of them as they move down the halls, go to lunch, to the rest rooms, to class. Van Sant follows them with long tracking shots as if he were providing insight for the slaughter that we know is coming. But in these long traipsings there is not one iota of high school life that all of us did not know beforehand, not one investment of emotion, just some sixty minutes of blandness into which the massacre will erupt. Van Sant could have begun his film with the slaughter itself, but then we would not have had the chance to admire his courage in doing nothing for the first hour of his picture. (Think of the painters who have given us square yards of sheer black so that they could put a thin ribbon of color at the side.)

We then see the two killers preparing for their exploit, including a joint shower in which they kiss. They discuss their plans and proceed. The leader's last words to his pal are "Have fun." At the end, the survivor just stands there calmly. (Despite all the murders, the police haven't yet appeared.) As far as we have seen, the murderers are run-of-the-mill boys: no explanation is hinted at. Why these two and not any of the others that we see? Is Van Sant telling us that it could have been any of the students? If so, his cool generalization makes the film even more irresponsible.

Summoning generosity, we can perhaps view *Elephant* as an attempt to take a horror out of its emotional context and hold it up in a dried, shriveled way, like one of those shrunken heads that some savages preserve and that have small relation to the act of decapitation. But to venture even this much rationale is to lean toward the Hanslick syndrome. Van Sant's film is a braggart piece of empty exhibitionism.

This country has become bilingual. So, I suppose, has every English-speaking country that shows American films. In other countries, the dubbing or subtitles control the matter. For us, the fact is that we now go to films and hear language at a level of vulgarity that most of the viewers would not themselves use. To put it a bit strenuously, but only a bit, we speak one language among ourselves and hear another in most American films.

Of course there are people to whom this schism does not apply; and of course any of the rest of us sometimes salt our conversation and enjoy it. But it seems to me past question that most reasonably civilized people, younger and older, now go to films quite prepared to spend a couple of hours in sulfurous sound that is not their own usage. I doubt that many people go to films expressly for a

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bath in verbal raunchiness, but not for many years have I heard anyone complain that the language in a recent film was scabrous. Instead, after a film people go back to their own mode of discourse—even when they discuss one of the steamy pictures.

This "other" language is not merely the exploitation of latter-day permissiveness. Some very good films use it. And possibly some film-makers believe that the viewer, well-spoken outside the Odeon, wants this roll in the raunchy. Possibly inquiries about the matter (like this one) are just wobbles of conscience about that roll.

Whatever the cause, whatever the secrets encased, the bifurcation exists—and it is most apparent when people discuss salty films in acceptable language. It won't do to argue that this schism between performance language and our speech has always existed, that a Shakespeare production isn't discussed in blank verse. Not many of us can extemporize in blank verse, but if we could, we wouldn't feel it out of place in post-Shakespeare discussion, as we certainly seem to feel about using f-words about f-films.

None of the above comment is the remotest hint for film censorship. It's just a note on a basically humorous contrast. ■

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Shotover's Apocalypse

HARD ON THE HEELS OF Jules Feiffer's *A Bad Friend* and Doug Wright's *I Am My Own Wife* comes another strong piece of political theater—this one inspired by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The joint work of Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, **OMNIUM GATHERUM** is what Shaw would have called a "disquisitory play": the characters are not so much specific individuals as personifications of representative classes and estates, randomly gathered together to debate recent events and the issues that may have caused them. Indeed, *Omnium Gatherum* seems to have been deeply influenced by *Heartbreak House*, Shaw's World War I play, though the celebrity-dinner-party setting may also owe something to Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*.

OMNIUM GATHERUM
(Variety Arts Theater)

ANNA IN THE TROPICS
(Roger S. Berlind Theatre)

The play has received a bad rap from Frank Rich, who dismissed it as "Tom Wolfe for dummies," congratulating "a complacent audience on its own moral superiority to the nattering nabobs onstage." That's a smart way to describe a lot of "serious" plays of recent vintage, but not this one. *Omnium Gatherum* struck me as a surprisingly intelligent, generally equitable attempt to give voice to the whole spectrum of reactions to the World Trade Center attack, though the hyperkinetic production values imposed by the director (Will Frears) sometimes make the characters, and the accomplished cast, seem more shallow than intended. But, far from being superficial, *Omnium Gatherum* is a more sophisticated and penetrating response to this event than, say, *September 11*, the recent anthology of international short films on the subject, many of them solipsistic and irrelevant.

Rather than exculpating the audience, the play strongly indicts the unthinking hedonism of a consumer society in which, as one character observes, "our spiritual response to any catastrophe should be to go out and shop." The dialogue is a reasonable facsimile of the kind of table talk one often hears these days, with soft-liners and hard-liners engaging each other, often at high decibel levels, about whether September 11 was the result of American indifference to the suffering of the oppressed or an act of absolute evil by a demented religious sect. Let us grant the unlikelihood of this particular group of people breaking (pita) bread together at the same table. The authors nevertheless manage to turn a gourmet dinner party—consumed against the background of a starving

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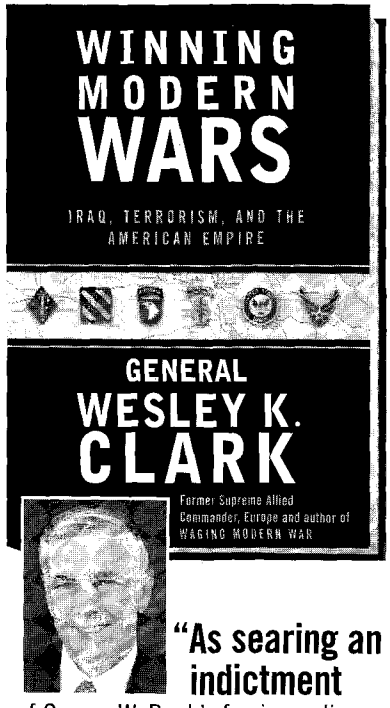
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Third World—into a metaphor for the spiritual bankruptcy of an increasingly corpulent culture. At the same time, the characters, functioning as both satirical commentators and objects of satire, are usually permitted to state their positions without looking like foolish stick figures or brainless mouthpieces.

In the text, an "omnium gatherum" is defined as "a collection of peculiar souls." Arranged behind a long dinner table like panelists at a symposium, savoring the exotic cuisine of a giddy, energized, eager-to-please hostess named Suzie (Kristine Nielsen), are six of these souls, later joined by an improbable seventh. Suzie, formerly a caterer, now running a totally accessorized household, is probably a likeness of the pre-indictment Martha Stewart, implacably trotting out the appetizers, salads, confits, and Italian wines while her guests are abusing and insulting each other. Part of the fun is identifying the actual people on which this *drame à clef* is based. The play's version of Boss Mangan, Shaw's vulgar capitalist, is Roger, a right-wing loudmouth resembling Tom Clancy, once (like Clancy himself) the favorite novelist of Ronald Reagan. As trumpeted by Phillip Clark, Roger is typical of those blustering, swaggering, hectoring males (perhaps "groping" should now be added to that list) who have begun to dominate the Republican Party. Still, his arguments are far from foolish. He calls for a strong response to terrorism by what he terms "the Military Industrial Entertainment Complex," and argues a cogent case for Israel that could have been written by Alan Dershowitz.

Then there is Terence (Dean Nolen), a wine-soaked left-wing Englishman putatively based on Christopher Hitchens. At times he blames Israel for the Muslim hatred of the United States; at times he blames human nature, proclaiming that "all of human history is a bloodbath—killing each other is what we do!" Then there is the Arab academic Khalid (Edward A. Hajj), a benign portrait of the late Edward Said, who died the morning of the play's opening. Khalid, who believes in a more generous distribution of the world's wealth, blames religious fundamentalism on the inability of the West, after the collapse of socialism, to create an effective ideological alternative to unrestrained corporate greed, and on its failure to check those who regard the universe, in Shaw's words, as "a machine for greasing their bristles and filling their snouts." And then there are more generic figures, with no real prototypes that I could identify—Julia (Melanna Gray), a black writer on community subjects who is more afraid of a bad review in *The New York Times* than of a terrorist attack; Lydia, played by the estimable Jenny Bacon, a self-righteous feminist, vegan, and PETA member; and a laconic fireman named Jeff (Joseph Lyle Taylor), who sits quietly throughout most of the play, scarfing down the food.

Much of the writing takes the form of surgical incisions into a culture that has grown fat and self-absorbed. Suzie, who believes that cigarettes "destabilize the atmosphere," breathes air flown in from overseas, and cultivates a hydroponic garden, exemplifies the nitwit faddism of the new capitalism. But for all the abuse she takes over how little she pays her employees, there isn't a maid or bartender in sight (for reasons that will later become clear, she serves the guests herself). Lydia makes a weak appeal for more government support of the arts ("Grow up," retorts Roger). And Julia, who says she sometimes feels like the only black person in the room (perhaps because she is), is prevailed upon to entertain the guests with a Whitney Houston number, though her singing voice is abysmal. Later descending into a pit that houses the opulent bathroom and its endless mirrored walls, Julia thinks she has entered a "shrine to our own shit." Shaw's Captain Shotover keeps dynamite in his cellar for the purpose of blowing up the human race if it goes too far. Arguably, this might be a good time to use it—for, like the characters in *Heartbreak House*, the omnium gatherum is composed of people who are "useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished."

Joining the dinner party toward the end is a figure programmed to bring about this apocalypse: a terrorist named Mohammed, played by Amir Arison. Suzie, in a sudden rush of radical chic, has invited him as "tonight's mystery guest." She expects Mohammed to spice up the party, and he doesn't disappoint her, grabbing a knife and attempting to stab the other guests. Upon being subdued, Mohammed hammers out fundamentalist boilerplate about the Palestinian occupation, American trade embargoes, and how we once dropped the atom bomb on innocent civilians. But in the most telling confrontation of the play, Khalid assails Mohammed for his brutal theocratic delusions. ("Can you kill and slaughter your way into heaven?") His world disintegrating, desperately trying to find some purpose in the void, Khalid warns that there will be a compassionate universe or none at all.

But Mohammed is already dead. And so is the fireman. Both are buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center. And so, it seems, are all the guests at the table. Gradually, imperceptibly, this noisy gathering has turned into a ghost supper, literally a dinner party from hell. The occasional whirring of a chopper overhead is replaced by the thundering of a large jet plane, while distant explosions edge closer and closer. To the strains of Sinatra singing "I Got the World on a String," the play ends with a shattering blast, bits of paper filtering down on the stage, as the characters freeze into catatonic silence. In Shaw, the bombs miss Heartbreak House; only a burglar and the greedy capitalist are killed. In the less forgiving *Omnium Gatherum*, Shotover's vision of total apocalypse finds its delayed consummation.

At the new Roger S. Berlind Theatre in Princeton, **Anna in the Tropics**, by the Cuban-American writer Nilo Cruz, is receiving a strong production at the hands of the McCarter Theatre Center, under the capable direction of Emily Mann. Originally commissioned by the New Theatre in Coral Gables, Florida, the play won the Pulitzer Prize last year on the basis of its text alone, since few if any of the judges had seen it staged. The current production, which moves to Broadway's Royale Theater this month, vindicates their judgment.

I am ashamed to say that this is the only work by the prolific Cruz that I have read or seen. If it is typical of his talent, another gifted playwright joins the post–September 11 theater renaissance. Cruz seems to be that rare thing, a writer of force and intelligence who nevertheless manages to leaven his insights with innocence, decency, and humanity. His capacity to invest simple declarative prose with bursts of imagery reminds me of García Lorca (one of Cruz's plays is called *Lorca in a Green Dress*), and he also possesses Lorca's capacity to restrain his own sophistication in order to enter the minds of uneducated people. (One speech about the dreamlike quality of life seems to have been influenced by Calderón.)

Anna in the Tropics is set in 1929 at

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the Flor Del Cielo Tampa, a cigar factory in a small Florida village called Ybor City. (Robert Brill's rough wood set actually has the look of a cigar box.) A number of Cubans have brought their cigar-rolling skills with them from Havana to Florida, along with their native language, their spells and superstitions, and such ancient traditions as betting on cockfights and burying women's hair under trees to help plants and fruits to grow. They are now in the process of reestablishing another tradition by importing a new reader or *lector*, as the Cubans call him: a person who, at a time when radio was still in its infancy, kept the workers entertained at their leaf-laying labors by reading aloud from books.

When the *lector*, Juan Julian, arrives, he brings with him a copy of *Anna Karenina*. The arc of the play is the reenactment of Anna and Vronsky's love affair by Juan Julian and Conchita, the wife of Palomo, another worker. Having been unfaithful himself, Palomo is now forced to play the part of Anna's cuckolded husband. There are other parallels with the novel as well—as one character notes, "Everybody's in love with this book." Conchita's father, the bibulous but warmhearted Santiago (Victor Argo), who owns the factory, identifies with the farmer Levin. But essentially the play is about the humanizing power of great literature, and its capacity to offer alternatives to the materialistic concerns of the poor as well as consolations for the harsh disappointments of everyday life.

Unfortunately, another *lector* has run off with the wife of a worker named Cheché, Santiago's half-Cuban half-brother, and when the obligatory moment of vengeance arrives, it comes not from Conchita's husband but from him. Cheché has been trying to modernize the tobacco factory, asking Santiago to get rid of the *lectors*, using machinery instead of manual labor. Although he knows he will eventually lose his business as a result, Santiago refuses. Machines may improve the bottom line, but they substitute the "quick smoke" for the leisure and relaxation of a hand-rolled cigar. It is a transitional historical moment, like the cutting down of the trees to make way for tract housing in *The Cherry Orchard*, or like the climax of Orson Welles's *Magnificent Ambersons*, when the hero is hit by one of those newfangled driving machines. Those who try to resist the modern juggernaut and preserve an old way of life are destined to

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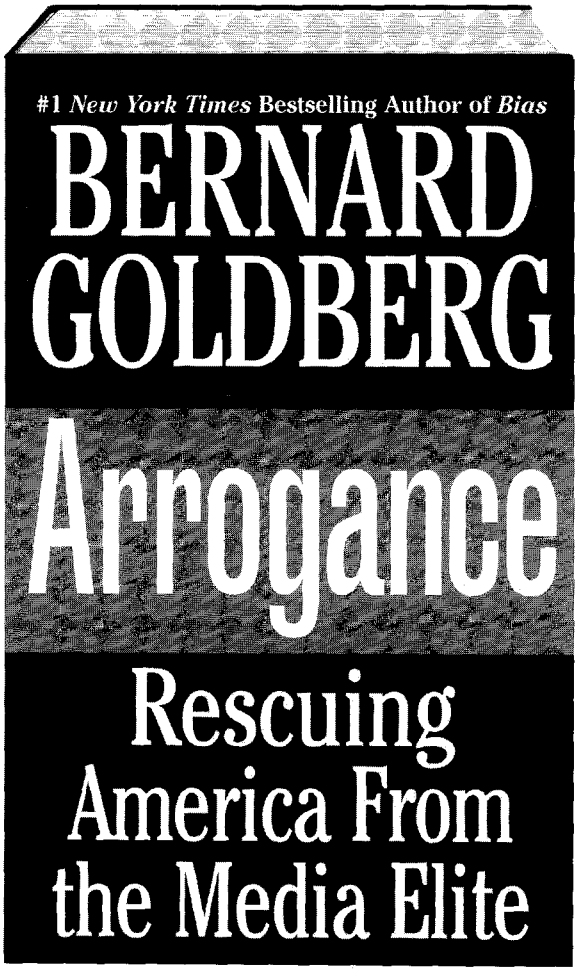

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be run over by it.

Anna in the Tropics is a refreshingly old-fashioned play about the power of love, and it is the love story between Juan Julian and Conchita that the director handles best. Played by Jimmy Smits, wearing a white suit and emitting a gentle pastel charm, Juan Julian at first resists the inevitable, then yields to it. And Conchita, played by Daphne Rubin-Vega as a seductive Carmen whose face is frozen in discontent, emerges less as Tolstoy's Anna than as Flaubert's Emma Bovary or Synge's Pegeen Mike—a woman spoiled by literature and seduced by the sound of words. The passionate and ominous ending of the first act, where the lovers come together for the first time with Palomo watching in the shadows, is one of those rare indelible theater moments.

Emily Mann's production is steeped in local color and cigar smoke. The play ends a bit melodramatically, with Cheché gunning down the hapless Juan Julian onstage. But the elegy that follows provides a note of hope. Palomo offers to finish the book, "reading the story in [Juan Julian's] honor, so he doesn't feel his job is undone." The five cigar rollers, working in silence at their desks, hold back their tears and look to the future, recalling Vanya and Sonia at the end of *Uncle Vanya*. *Anna in the Tropics* is a truly sweet play, warmly acted by an excellent cast, notable for the way it restores some of the humanity that has lately been missing from our lives. ■

Enrique Krauze
Eruptions

SURVIVORS IN MEXICO
By Rebecca West
Edited and with an introduction
by Bernard Schweizer
(Yale University Press, 264 pp., $26.95)

I.

THIS BOOK MIGHT HAVE BEEN the definitive anatomy of Mexico. A supremely gifted stylist and a subtle observer of human behavior in all its paradoxes and contortions, Rebecca West was notably adept at tracing the pull of the past—"that great intoxicant of nations"—upon individuals and countries, and she would have found much fertile ground in this history-obsessed place. She would not have lacked personal reasons to visit Mexico: the country—its volcanoes and volcanic passions—was an unfinished chapter in her family story since before her birth. When she finally came to Mexico in 1966, at the age of seventy-four, it was too late. She was burdened with family troubles and too weary for an undertaking that would have required no less physical and intellectual effort than *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, her masterpiece about the Balkans.

West's timing was a pity, for Mexico's history of religious and ethnic convergence represented something like the inverse of the history of the Balkans. In any event, *Survivors in Mexico* remained unfinished and unedited in her files. Published now in a commendable, painstaking, and timely edition by Bernard Schweizer, it is not the book that it might have been, but it is still one of the most original and intelligent attempts at comprehension of the "eccentric outpost of the West," as Octavio Paz called Mexico.

The Mexican adventures of the West family constitute a novel in themselves. Hardly mentioned in the recent biography by Carl Rollyson, they are narrated in amusing detail by West herself in *Survivors in Mexico*. In 1852, in search of a father figure to take charge of the spiritual and moral education of her four children, the Irishwoman Arabella Fairfield—Rebecca's widowed grandmother on her father's side—contracted the services of Elie Reclus, one of the two brothers Reclus, young French anarchists (and the authors of the "strike of folded arms" and other forms of resistance) who were then refugees in England. In a comedy of errors, the stubbornly devout Christian Arabella believed that she was hiring a puritanical preceptor to guard against the evils of the century, while the atheist-anarchist Elie thought that Arabella's works of charity represented a modern populist impulse. The eventual discovery of the misunderstanding did not end the agreement, because the children adored the wise and selfless Elie, who shepherded them for four years, at the end of which they began their formal education and the Reclus brothers returned to Paris, where Elisée would write the nineteen volumes of his monumental *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, and Elie would become a pioneer of social anthropology and a teacher of comparative mythology.

Both brothers possessed that rare combination—typical in anarchists—of scientific inclination and redemptive violence, which explains their no less extravagant fascination with volcanoes, those archetypal symbols of nature and revolution. Elie transmitted his telluric faith to the Fairfield children and to his disciples in Paris, among whom, at the end of the nineteenth century, was a young Mexican painter named Gerardo Murillo. Under the pseudonym of Doctor Atl, Murillo would play the double role of social agitator and promoter of the art of muralism during and after the Mexican Revolution, and for five decades he would paint the volcanic landscape of Mexico.

CHARLES FAIRFIELD, REBECCA'S remote father, remained in contact with Reclus and met Atl in Paris. They spoke of the volcanoes of Mexico. Years before, upon leaving the army, Charles had visited Mexico as if on a pilgrimage to Mecca, with the sole purpose of prostrating himself before Popocatepetl, Iztaccihuatl, and the Peak of Orizaba. He died in 1906, when Rebecca was fourteen years old, but not before bequeathing to her this fascination. From then on, as West writes, "any volcano seemed something of the earthly and the sacred." In the epic of her life there remained a chapter yet to be written: she had to re-trace her father's path, and meet Doctor Atl, and see the incomparable volcanoes of Mexico.

This dream came true as the result of a *New Yorker* assignment to write a piece on the grandson of Leon Trotsky, the deposed revolutionary who was

Enrique Krauze is the editor of LETRAS LIBRES. *This essay was translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer.*

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murdered in Mexico City in 1940. Her reporting naturally led her to Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, who lived in Trotsky's neighborhood and are the subjects, along with Atl, of a long and uncharacteristically misguided stretch of *Survivors in Mexico*. These pages are flawed not only because of West's insufficient reporting and Trotsky's incidental place in Mexican history, but also because West anachronistically presents the famous pair of painters as pioneering a "Mexican art" that had in fact already been evolving for three decades in more complex, varied, and modern forms in the work of Rufino Tamayo and many others.

The ordinarily wise West did not have the time or the learning or the friends to orient herself in contemporary Mexican art or to be dissuaded from focusing excessively on Atl, a worthy but tangential painter and a rather pathetic figure in the political history of Mexico, in which he figures abjectly—like the more influential José Vasconcelos—as an intellectual supporter of the Nazis. (A fierce and militant anti-Semite, Atl could not forgive the painter David Alfaro Siqueiros for his Portuguese-Jewish heritage.) West devotes no less than a fifth of her brief and uneven book to reflections on these characters, which would sink the book entirely were it not for the truly dazzling insights of her two critical overviews of Mexican society and Mexican history, and her brief physical descriptions of Mexico, which seem inspired by the humanistic approach to geography that was championed by the Recluses, her intellectual grandparents.

WEST RECOGNIZED THIS legacy in herself: "Since my father was so largely Elie Reclus, so I am." In *Survivors in Mexico*, she offers in a single Reclusian page an elegant and precise impression of the Mexican landscape, which also debunks the myth—originally fabricated by Hernán Cortés and nourished by the country's "horn of plenty" shape—of Mexico's legendary riches:

> Mexico is as beautiful as Greece, but it is more perversely anti-human than even that barren land. In the far backward of time, the isthmus was wrecked by an explosion in its basement, which sent up a line of volcanoes, some now extinct, some still in practice, and three at least of marvelous beauty. There are the docile, serviceable lands round Cuernavaca and Oaxaca to show what a paradise was then riven down the middle; but riven it was, and there are huge areas where the surface is broken up into blocks, varying in size from acres to feet, set at angles to each other. Most of the rivers in such districts run at the bottom of deep gullies, hundreds or even thousands of feet in depth, and elsewhere there is a superficial layer of limestone through which the water runs as if it were a sieve, to be tapped only by wells.

West's description of Mexico City is even more perceptive. Instead of being horrified by the size of the city and the overcrowding that characterized it already in her day, she pokes a little fun at it and even finds a certain charm in it:

> In Mexico City there is in street after street of tiny houses an architectural carnival. Here a small balconied reference to Venice is squeezed up against a neoclassical edifice rubbing its minuscule colonnade against the product of what someone remembers about the Bauhaus from an article seen in a dentist's waiting-room.... How does one make love here without being congratulated by the neighbors in the morning? ... The growth of Mexico City presents a grave problem, but it is characteristic that its solution looks gay and prettily surrealist in a jigsaw way.

West did not manage to meet Atl, who died in 1964, but she gazed in an almost mystical trance upon the famous glass curtain in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, an immense Art Nouveau work of stained glass depicting the two volcanoes. She felt herself the sole possessor of the secret that inspired the piece, which was designed by Atl: "Cry out the ghosts of Dr. Atl and Elie and Elisée Reclus from the twenty-seven tons of glass cubes in which they are forever enmeshed, the spectacle is superb." But her satisfaction was even more complete—it was the climax of her Mexican experience—when at last, "in between the silver trunks of the eucalyptus trees," she saw the great volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, and all the symbols and all the realities could finally be measured against each other.

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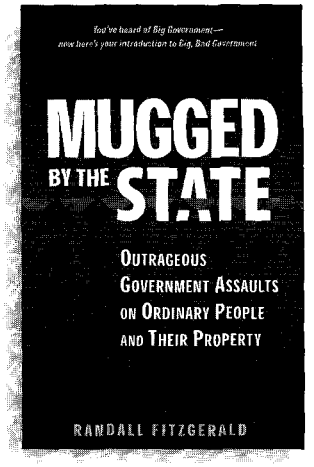

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II.

THE APPEARANCE OF *The Plumed Serpent* in 1926 created a before and an after in non-Mexican writing about Mexico. Before D. H. Lawrence, Mexico was a historical reality to be studied, not a symbolic entity to be deciphered. For almost four centuries, chroniclers, monks, historians, adventurers, revolutionaries, reporters, novelists, poets, and travelers of every stripe arrived with the object of discovering the place for themselves. Of particular importance in this rich genealogy were the works by women. Perhaps the classic travel account was the one written between 1839 and 1842 by the wife of the Spanish ambassador in Mexico, the Scotswoman Frances Erskine Inglis, the Marquesa Calderón de la Barca, a friend and correspondent of Prescott. Her book is unmatched in its exhaustiveness, in its detail, in its color, but she was followed in the twentieth century by a notable succession of female perspectives (which, without exaggerating the point, are almost always more down-to-earth and generous than their male counterparts), to which there is now added the poetic, ingenious, and sensitive vision of Rebecca West.

Then came Lawrence, and Mexico began to represent something different: an unexplored reserve of salvationist myths. The symbology of muralism was political and social; but Lawrence cared only for the mythological. He was not seeking a lost paradise or a promise of social harmony; he was inciting "the generous impulse of the blood." Mexico became Sexico. Lawrence's romantic rebellion, reflected in his plumed novel, invoked a truth that asked to correspond not to the empirical order of things, but to the substance of dreams, a truth hidden by appearances, a Reality behind reality. Lawrence's work established a particular way of looking at Mexico, a hugely influential point of regard that is not only symbolic but also magical and even occult or esoteric.

Katherine Anne Porter, who wrote several memorable stories and essays about Mexico, found this approach disconcerting. "*The Plumed Serpent* is a confession of faith," she maintained, "a summing up of the philosophy of D. H. Lawrence. Mexico, the Indians, the cult of ... Quetzalcoatl ... all these are pretexts. Symbols made up to measure of his preoccupations.... He turned soothsayer, and began to interpret by a formula: the result is a fresh myth of the Indian, a deeply emotional conception but a myth none the less, and a debased one." Lawrence's great novel itself is redeemed, as Porter rightly recognizes, by its "sheer poetic power, a mystical thrust above his obsessions and debased occult dogma." But the degradation to which Porter alludes is not aesthetic, it is historical and ultimately moral. It consists in denying everything that—in Lawrence's literary imagination—departs from that which is purely and primordially indigenous, from the deep and unfathomable power of blood.

Rebecca West by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

"These people are volcanoes," writes Lawrence. "The volcanoes that exist all over the country are symbols of the people; they will erupt again and more forcefully than before. What seems like laughter in their eyes ... is not laughter. It is heat which is returning to its state as lava." Not even Rebecca West, the venerator of volcanoes and admirer of the genius of Lawrence since the 1920s, could share this mystical philosophy of blood. Perhaps that is why she avoided topics that might have reminded her of coarse Lawrentian vitalism on her trip to Mexico, such as the liturgical visitation of the Day of the Dead. "I could have only D. H. Lawrenced that," she wrote. For West, as for Porter, Mexico is emphatically not an Aztec hieroglyph, nor does it hold the secret keys to a cosmic rebirth. Mexico is a conglomeration of premodern, modern, anti-modern, and now postmodern elements, which demands a balanced interpretation of its history and a frank and concrete approach to its boundlessly complex reality. Before imagining what Mexico represented, it was necessary to discover how and why it had become what it was.

"Why had she come to this high plateau of death?" Kate Leslie, the Irish heroine of Lawrence's novel, asks herself. She has come "to return the magic to her life, and to save herself from the deterioration and sterility of the world." Those are different reasons from those that animated Rebecca West, herself half-Irish and a great interpreter of myths who kept her distance from myths, in order to avoid being swallowed up by their romance of the irrational. To the extent that Kate may be considered an alter ego of Lawrence, it is perhaps worthwhile to compare her opinions to West's in *Survivors in Mexico*. The two works belong to different genres, and they were written at very different moments. The wounds of the "bronco Mexico" that Lawrence observed had yet to heal after the blood-drenched Revolution. His Mexico was one of pistol-toting generals, military rebellions, bands of armed landless peasants who murdered landowners, bloody strikes, clashes between Catholic peasants and Jacobin politicians. Not only Lawrence, but also

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a short-lived president of Mexico named Eulalio Gutiérrez, said that "the Mexican countryside smells of death." But forty years later, West encountered a very different country: urban, peaceful, stable, with a growing economy and a reasonably efficient welfare state.

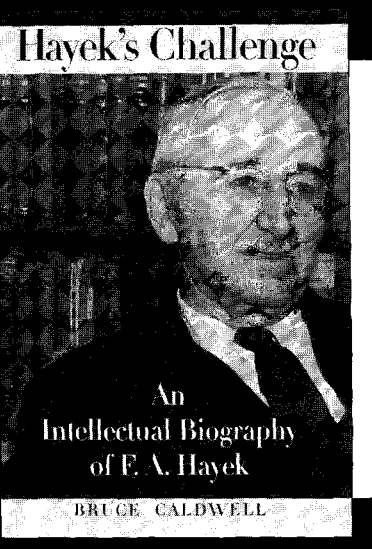
And yet, at the level of customs and mentalities, the country had changed as little as its volcanic landscape, and this is why it was able to see itself in the mirror offered by Octavio Paz in his classic book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which appeared in 1950 and was based partially on Lawrence. (West, by the way, compares Paz to Montaigne.) Nor is it a coincidence that the first edition of another telluric work, *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry, appeared in Mexico years later and was a great success. So which key best unlocked the soul of Mexico, magic or reason, symbol or fact, myth or reality?

IN THE SCENE THAT SERVES IN Lawrence's novel as an introduction to Mexico, Kate attends a bullfight, a tense and repulsive spectacle of bloodshed, sadism, and death, which triggers in her a series of grim revelations regarding "this heavy continent of dark-souled death," its "squalid evil," its "pure brutish evil," its propensity for crime, lies, and despair, the "burning furious rage" of a malevolent country that devours its prey like a serpent and "pulls you down like a great weight!" West could have gone to see a bullfight, which were as popular in the 1960s as they were in the 1920s, but the cool-headed and judicious writer preferred to seek out people, and so she attended a different Sunday spectacle with her husband, taking a walk through the Bosque de Chapultepec and the neighboring amusement park, where she discovered a de-Lawrenced Mexico, the peaceful landscape of the Mexican family:

> This choice seems the odder when it is thrust upon one here, in Grasshopper Hill, particularly at the weekend or on holidays, when it is thronged with families walking together in amity delicious and quite unfamiliar to foreign eyes. In Mexico the bottom has not yet fallen out of parenthood. Here it is rare to see a child staring in hatred at its mother and father, seeking with Spock-fed vitality for a grievance, which, if it goes on taking its orange juice, it will be able to convert into a cause of life-long war.

Lawrence believed that the Catholic religion was a "foreign" reality in Mexico, and only skin-deep. The churchly domes that dotted even the country's most inaccessible corners seemed to him "trembling pagodas of an unreal race, gorgeous churches waiting, above the huts and straw of the natives, like ghosts to be dismissed." Dismissed by whom? By an older and inner telluric force, an indigenous spirit capable of absorbing even Jesus Christ. In a poem inserted into the novel, Jesus relaxes once more "into the eye of the Father" and "sleeps in the healing sandals of the Saviour," going down "past the mount of the sun" to see below him the "white breast-tips of Mexico/My bride." Nor do the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who have visited the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe year after year since the seventeenth century, many of them journeying to Mexico City from the countryside literally on their knees, move Lawrence greatly. "All of this is unreal," he told his friend Witter Bynner. "It is done only for the spectacle. One minute they are prostrating themselves in the churches ... the next they are out walking in the streets, full of joy and pulque, as if they had never heard of Jesus Christ."

Imaginative as she was, West nevertheless saw a living religion, and not a ghostly one: "This society, if not Roman Catholic in a way it can please Rome, is dyed indelibly with Catholicism." In one of the book's many illuminating passages (and in prose as intensely poetic as Lawrence's), West reflects on the worship by poor Mexicans, and particularly Indians, of "the life-sized effigies of the suffering Christ," which they dress in "crimson cotton velvet gowns, as if he were the defeated kind, whom they had found naked and paralyzed by the roadside and have to clothe." The Indians, West believes, are "exiles" in the river of time, and they love Christ because they see him "as if he were the most unfortunate exile of them all." His sacrifice is their sacrifice. As if debating with Lawrence—what a pleasure such a debate would have been!—she accepts that "if one goes over to the side of the Indians, one has to take over their Aztec gods, that is fair enough. But also one has to take over the Christianity in which they and their gods took shelter when the disaster came."



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Exploring the foundational myth of Mexican religious identity—the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the cloak of the Indian peasant Juan Diego in 1531—West recalls the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of New Spain, before whom the miracle, or the "beautiful story," as West calls it, took place. And from here she spins several admirably perceptive threads. She recounts the story of the so-called "spiritual conquest," the initial work by the Franciscans, which, if it failed to stave off defeat and the ensuing demographic disasters, did console the conquered, and gave them a place in the Catholic world order. Also, by recognizing their natural liberties, the "spiritual conquest" saved Mexico from the extremes of cruelty and slavery of the European domination in America. And on another Sunday morning, with her acquired sensitivity to the weight of history, West watched the penitents walking on their knees toward the basilica, "each carrying a candle, and some of the women a baby as well." She acknowledged the human gravity of the event, the spiritual solemnity of the faces, of the old women who pray "half-inside and half-outside an open door," She heard the typical silence of the Mexican crowd, and she remarked:

> It seems a gross idea of pleasing God, but a sideways look at these penitents' faces suggests not brutish superstition but rather oversensitivity. People know their own business best; and there is a certain propriety in the performance of extraordinary acts in this place which came into being for extraordinary reasons.

So which divinity presides over Mexico, Quetzalcoatl or Christ? Anyone who has visited Mexico with open eyes knows the answer. Anyone who has witnessed the visits of Pope John Paul II to Mexico (including the most recent one, its purpose the canonization of the Indian Juan Diego) knows the answer, and knows that it flatters Rome.

Ulysses
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III.

"MONGREL MEN OF A MONgrel city," says Lawrence at the start of the novel. A Mexican character called Toussaint holds forth on the perverse consequences of the Mexican mixing of races: "you mix different blood races and you produce the half-breed. Now the half-breed is a calamity. For why? He is neither one thing nor the other, he is divided against himself.... He is an unfortunate, a calamity to himself. And this is Mexico. The Mexicans of mixed blood are hopeless.... There is no hope for Mexico short of a miracle."

But Rebecca West, who had delved for five years into the centuries-old ethnic hatreds of Yugoslavia, was able to see with greater profundity. The social and cultural miracle of Mexico—and this worldly miracle was a real one—could be found in the color of the beverage that she used to drink on those distant Balkan days: "coffee, chocolate, chocolate and milk, coffee and milk ... but always brown." The Mexicans have "solved another [problem], which everywhere else I have been had seemed insoluble": the problem of color, of skin tone, of race. In the two remarkable chapters that she devotes to "race relations," West mocks the schizophrenic tendencies of many (light-skinned) Mexicans who were still complaining in the 1960s (in Spanish, of course) about what "the Spaniards did to us." (The same complaints continue to be heard today.) Nor did she fail to notice the national ambivalence regarding indigenous traditions, with dead Indians idolized and live Indians the object of guilty aggression. But the great Mexican mix, the thrilling ethnic impurity, the hybridity, redeemed everything:

> For it is wonderful to find oneself in a country where the population is black and white and see that though they are subject to rage (even specially so), there is not among them the disgusting bickering of master and slave, which never can come to agreement because slavery lies athwart the argument, blocking the road to solution. Here, if a white man and a man of mixed blood quarrel, it is simply as if a dark man has fallen out with his brother who takes after the other side of the family and is fair: no more than that.

Like a parrot and a dog that "chatter" without communicating across unbridgeable "gulfs of dimension," so Indians and non-Indians belong—according to Lawrence's explanation in *Mornings in Mexico*—to different orbits that never intersect. "The Indian way of consciousness is different from and fatal to our way of consciousness," he wrote with his characteristic certainty and simplicity. "Our way of consciousness is different from and fatal to the Indian. The two ways, the two streams are never to be united." *The Plumed Serpent* goes a step further: it not only posits the unresolvable difference of the Indians, but also prophesies the reversal of the Conquest: "a conquered race sucks the blood of the conquerors so that now the race of the conquerors of Mexico is soft and boneless, children crying in helpless hopelessness."

WEST WILL HAVE NONE OF this. As she walks spellbound, like Alexander von Humboldt or the Marquesa Calderón de la Barca, through Indian markets—"The fruit shone brightly as if they were in a poem by Keats, some, like the one with the pale gold husk curling back from garnet-red pulp, were formal like jewelry.... There were bunches of tiny bananas like casts of children's hands in soft gold. I have seen a pile of straw hats which exploited their unpromising form as ingeniously as I had seen it done in a drawing by Braque"—West sees the Indians seeing her. "To the Indians we were appearing as characters out of the Forsyte Saga, say old Jolyon and Aunt Juley. Old and thick-blooded and dreamless creatures, able to deal with the cash nexus but no good for anything else." And then, in an exhilarating moment of untendentious perceptions, West rebels against the injustice in this situation of ... the Indians!

Her rejection of the putatively absolute and fatal difference of the Indian is West's most anti-Lawrentian stance. (She would have offended Subcomandante Marcos, too.) For her, Mexico is not the romantic site of otherness, but yet another locus of human sameness. That is why she is surprised by the surprise of an old Indian in Yanhuitlán ("He looks like a neat small-boned Lear, and it is

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the violent skies above him and the violent earth behind him which are his Regan and his Goneril") when the guide relays to him a detailed remark that her husband Henry has made about frosts in the mountains. How could the Indian believe that the couple could not possibly have their own knowledge or experience of frosts?

There is not a shadow of prejudice in West's attitude toward the Indians. She knows—and this is reflected in her historical chapters—that they are the real "survivors" to whom her title alludes, and that the accumulated weight of history that they bear has been onerous indeed. The stoic pre-Hispanic material culture that West discusses in detail (no domestic animals, no beasts of burden, no wheel) placed demands on the people that were as rigid and merciless as those of the cosmogonies that West describes in the chapter "Religion and Sorcery." Here she puts all her intellectual sorcery to the test of unearthing the central deficiency of the Mexican religion—Aztec, she calls it—and her insights are remarkable: "Too obstinate a determination to make the universe consistent. They lacked what Keats declared to be the necessary prerequisite of greatness, Negative Capability, the capacity for being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

At the age of seventy-four, West had earned the right to connect all her reading with all her experience and to rethink everything freely, even what it meant to inhabit the cosmic prison of the Aztecs, a prison of capricious gods who could only be confronted with frenzied magic, and of men trapped in a time that passed without passing, a time that was not progressively linear but pointlessly circular, fickle, and, in the end, unpredictable:

> To arrive at the Mesoamerican state of mind, read the Book of Revelation and consider what it would be like to have been already four times through the experiences there described, to have heard four times the loud voice crying to the birds in high heaven, "Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond," and to know no reason why that loud voice should not speak again.

West did not believe in formulas for saving the Indians, and even less in prophecies that they would save themselves. She did not believe in the indigenous dream of Mexico. From her experience of the twentieth century, she knew very well that symbolic or mythological or metaphysical dreams become nightmares in waking life. The Indians were not pure beings, or inscrutable entities, or "real men" who turned all "others" into shadow people, or theological bulwarks guarding against suspect progress, or gods awakening. They were people, like everyone else: "And what the Indians (and indeed all of us) have a right to insist upon is that the thinkers of the world should work out general principles likely to lessen the pain.... That indeed was the aim of Jewish and Christian ethics."

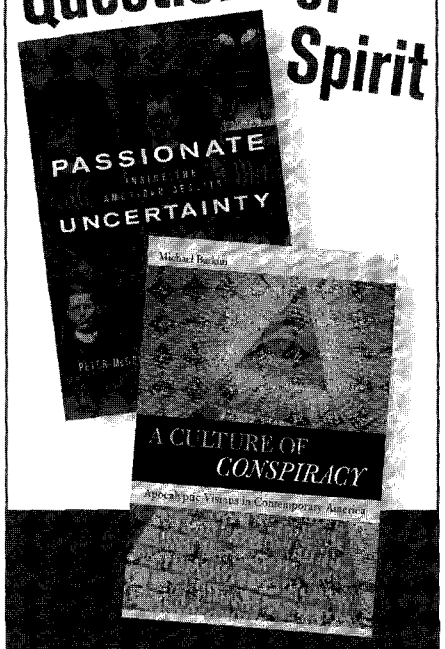
IV.

"THE REASON FOR THIS, LIKE everything that happens in these parts, is historical." In a conversation with a cab driver, upon visiting the statues and monuments of the city, at the Museum of Anthropology and the pyramids of Teotihuacán, West recognized the basic fact of Mexican life: the ruthless pull of the past. Faced with the schizophrenic quarrel, within this single civilization, of one set of ancestors with another, West proceeded like a good psychoanalyst of culture and put the country on the couch to re-create the moment of original trauma, the Conquest.

The central event seems clear: the powerful Aztec empire—more advanced in some areas than its counterparts in Europe—was not in the process of decline when the Spaniards conquered it in 1521, "but had been annihilated by an act of aggression against which it had not been able to prepare." Yet contrary to received opinion, the final assessment is mixed. It is true that the Conquest brought about ecological disaster, the destruction of the careful systems of irrigation, the razing of the forests, and the terrible drop in population as a result of epidemics; but it is also true that "the Spaniards did much for Mexico" by introducing animal and vegetable products, production methods, and technical tools.

But when West stops being Freud and turns into Jung, she takes her fantasy too far. In one such passage, she explains

Questions of Spirit



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the curse that gold represented for the Indians, a curse later to be turned on the Hapsburg empire in the form of inflation, the "Byzantine tradition of magnificence," belated technical development, irresponsibility, guilt, and decadence, the origins of which West attributes to the symbolically "violatory" character of mining (she speaks of the miner as a "rapist") and the "excremental" ("symbol for excrement") character of metal money (for the Indians, gold and silver were "excrements of the gods"). Here she is Lawrencing the subject.

In a series of brief essays—a mix of biography, history, reportage, hard fact, audacious opinion, and poetry—based on a few well-known primary sources (Bernal Díaz, Gómara) and a respectable contemporary bibliography (Salvador de Madariaga, Lesley Byrd Simpson, Jacques Soustelle), West returns to the story of the Conquest, which has been told a thousand and one times before. Her narration has in some places a suspiciously Eastern slant, as in the reference (probably taken from Prescott) to the "Moslem paradise" of Moctezuma. Understandably for someone who had studied the Muslim killings in Serbia, West sees shadows of the East wherever she looks. What, for example, is the basis of her wild hypothesis that the Conquest raised fears that the greedy conquistadors would transfer their loyalties to the Turks, the ascendant naval power of the time, and follow the lead of the four hundred monks who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to North Africa to become Muslims?

But, these conjectures aside, West's telling of the tale is perfect: she includes everything one ever wanted to know about the irresolute and tortured Moctezuma, the sensual and obliging Doña Marina (what would West not have given for Luis González's description of her as a "trilingual secretary"!), the shrewd and cerebral Cortés (who was nothing like the figure painted by Diego Rivera, and not very different from the clever man depicted by such recent writers as José Luis Martínez, Hugh Thomas, or Juan Miralles). But West's script is not written by these characters so much as by the fatal clash of two divergent understandings of Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican god who so impressed Lawrence. From the moment that Moctezuma and Cortés meet in Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519, the narrative acquires a greater intensity, because Moctezuma is finally convinced that Cortés is Quetzalcoatl, and Cortés—upon confirming once more that there is blood on the walls, the habitual blood of sacrifice—steps into his role in an act of theological resolve and performs accordingly.

West's account has the wonderful and wise effect of reconciling her Mexican reader to his ancestors. She has made him see that in other lands, and even in recent times, racial and religious conflicts similar to those that Mexico resolved over the centuries have caused whites to enslave blacks, Nazis to exterminate Jews, and Muslim Bosnians and Christian Serbs to slaughter each other. It turns out that as a space for human cohabitation, Mexico, despite everything, has not fared so badly. And this conclusion is as valid today as it was when West delivered it.

"IT IS NOTHING BUT A SORT OF infectious disease, like syphilis all this revolution and socialism," says one of Lawrence's characters. In the time that she spent in Mexico, West learned enough to refute him, and to understand something that is not easy for foreigners to grasp: the institutional legitimacy, strangely timeless and even permanent, of the Mexican Revolution, "something like what Marx called a social revolution, but cozier." In a few swift lines, West captured the essence of the paternalistic and corrupt regimes of the era ("careless of accountancy, never forgetful of social justice"), noted the country's alarming demographic tendencies, and—most surprisingly—anticipated the crisis of 1968, observing that if the Mexican president stopped adopting a paternal attitude, the people would immediately turn against him. But perceptive as these judgments may have been, they come nowhere near to covering the abyss that opens between Mexico at the time of the Conquest and Mexico at the time of West's experience of it. This is the central problem of this extraordinary book: it contains an immense gap of four hundred fifty years.

"Free Mexico is a bully, and the old colonial, ecclesiastical Mexico was another sort of bully," says one of Lawrence's characters. West could not have disputed this Lawrentian mistake, because she did not know those Mexicos. By stopping her inquiry at the sixteenth century, West ignores too many things: the three centuries of the Hapsburg and Bourbon viceroyalties, the War of Independence, the civil and ethnic wars of the nineteenth century, the invasion by the United States (she almost completely omits to mention Mexico's proximity to the United States), the extremely important War of Reform, the French intervention, and so on. It is significant that in referring to Porfirio Díaz West makes two colossal blunders: "great soldiers make poor statesmen" and "Díaz had left the state coffers empty." Even Díaz's severest critics concede that he was a great statesman, perhaps Mexico's greatest; and nobody has ever claimed that personal corruption was one of his faults.

West understood Mexico's original trauma, but she did not have time to see Mexico's abiding dilemma: the tension between tradition and modernity. At the center of this dilemma is the War of Reform that was fought from 1858 to 1861 between conservatives and liberals, and its sequel, the French intervention in the years between 1862 and 1867. In this crucial decade, the country was caught between two conflicting projects: one liberal and fully dedicated to democracy, the other conservative and rooted in variations on the closed corporate structure of a colony. The clash between the two projects led to a kind of compromise that lasted more than a century: a liberal society, a mixed economy, a conservative state. With the elections of 2000, Mexico seemed to opt decisively for the path of liberal democracy, proposed time and again over its long history. It is not yet clear whether this great endeavor will take firm hold. Too many myths stand in its way.

WHEN THE "DIDACTIC Toussaint" lectures Kate Leslie on the "chaos" caused by the mixing of races, he refers to President Benito Juárez to illustrate his case: "a pure Indian. He floods his old consciousness with the new white ideas, and there springs up a whole forest of verbiage, new laws, new constitutions and all the rest.... It grows like a weed on the surface, saps the strength of the Indian soil underneath, and helps the process of ruin." West mentions Juárez only twice, in an offhand way, as if he were a statue, without suspecting that his story represents—especially now, almost two hundred years after his birth—exactly the opposite of what "Toussaint" predicted. Benito Juárez was in fact a Zapotec Indian

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who learned Spanish at the age of twelve. He governed Mexico from 1858 to 1872. Over the course of his long political career (which included legal, legislative, and executive posts in Oaxaca, the state where he was born, and in the federal sphere), he underwent an ideological and political transformation that, while not complete, contained a message of the greatest importance for the Mexico that West visited, and even for present-day Mexico.

The lesson of Juárez is not, as the indigenists of today would prefer, a postmodernized Lawrentian idealization of the Indians and the consequent segregation of them by perpetuating their old prostration. It is, rather, a call to complete the cycle of the liberal alternative ("new laws, new constitutions and all the rest") thanks to which Mexico has been, since 1858, with all its defects and limitations, a country of true civil liberties and equality before the law. Through the efforts of the liberal generation of Juárez, many "pure Indians" and others not so pure effectively "flooded" their "old consciousness with the new white ideas," but these ideas represent a legacy of republican civility and secularism that Rebecca West did not witness. It is upon this legacy that Mexico must build its future, not on the jungle of our social and national myths, or upon the dark appeals of blood and faith. I do not doubt that Rebecca West would have agreed. She studied Mexico not only with intelligence, but also with love. "Only in Quetzalcoatl there is sweetness," she wrote. There was sweetness in her, too. ■

Lorraine Adams
Lady Novelist

A WHISTLING WOMAN
By A.S. Byatt
(Alfred A. Knopf, 429 pp., $26)

IN A.S. BYATT'S FINAL NOVEL OF a tetralogy that she began in 1978, we are constrained to read about ethnomethodology. We have not only snails, but snails in regard to Jacobson, Ungar, Hebb, Hagiwara, and J.Z. Young. We have a mentally ill wife of a university dean quoting Yeats, Vaughan, and Jung. We have untranslatable words in lost languages, *adam te dageram armtet algar algastna*, and untranslated Latin, *sortes virgilianae*. We have D.H. Lawrence by way of Leavis and caves by way of Plato. We have preparations of the subesophageal ganglion of *Helix aspersa*. We have interactive sessions on chiromancy, oneiromancy, and geomancy. We have dinner conversations about Cantor's mathematics of infinite sets and Gödel's ideas about incompleteness. We have heated chatter on Leontes and Polixenes in *A Winter's Tale* and religious metaphor in *Paradise Lost*. We have a character who says, "I want to solve phylotaxis." We have the Body-Mind Conference, at which a character named Hodder Pinsky talks about Gestalt and schemata, and a character named Theobold Eichenbaum talks about instinct and learning in wild and domesticated animals, and a character named Lyon Bowman talks about the neurochemistry of memory, and a character named Jacob Strope talks about whether machines think, and a character named Luk Lysgaard-Peacock talks about slugs and the biological disadvantage of sexual reproduction, and a character named Griselda Bragge questions the naturalness of musical intervals, and a character named Edmund Wilkie talks on Vermeer, Picasso, and the representation of the act of perception, and a character named Canon Adelbert Holly talks about changing interpretations of the Incarnation, and a character named Brendan Cleaver talks about consciousness in the "persistent vegetative state," and a character named Gerard Wijnnobel talks about deep structure, surface fluency, and ideas of a universal language. And after 427 pages of this, we learn from Byatt's acknowledgments that Steve Jones and Frances Ashcroft have been patient with the writer's "queries about snails and genetics, physiology and cognition," and that

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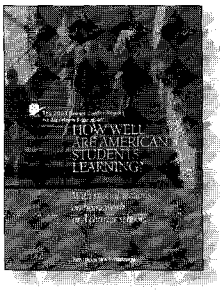

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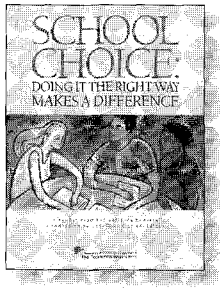

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Byatt is in the debt of Steven Rose, Helena Cronin, Robert Hinde, Pat Bateson, Matt Ridley, Richard Dawkins, John Maynard Smith, Antonio Damasio, Semir Zeki, Marion Dawkins, and Arnold Feinstein "for help with science," and of Reverend Mark Oakley and Dr. J. S. Fountain "for help with religion." We learn also that Byatt is grateful to Leanne Klein, whose "film of gorse was a useful delight."

Byatt is a writer who struggles mightily to be the undertaker of her own silliness. She buries what George Eliot called "feminine fatuity" under a mountain of bibliographic cavil. Byatt is credited with being a novelist of ideas, but really she is a melodramatic pedant. She sees herself as the granddaughter of Eliot, who taught her, she has written, that characters can "worry an idea, they are, within their limits, responsive to politics and art and philosophy and history." She seems not to have noticed that Eliot's greatness has something to do with her patient tapping out of the individual keys of moral slippage, her intelligent and humane and believable descriptions of complexity, which is never confused with aesthetic and historical filigree. Byatt prefers wiggly surfaces to sure depths. She depends on her readers' exhaustion, or insecurity, to claim Eliot's mantle. Who, after all, could be left standing, in a mood for close reading—let alone considered thinking—after ingesting the learnedness with which Byatt lards the four novels of her quartet?

Once the ethnomethodology, the chiromancy, the snails, and the Latin become (as best as they can become) understandable, Byatt turns out to be precisely what she dreads most: a lady novelist writing silly novels. In her writing about Eliot's essay on "lady novelists," Byatt mistakenly concludes that Eliot decries only fluff and flounce. Of course she does; but Eliot is not content with such a pedestrian observation. She knows that girlish silliness takes many forms, and that one of them is pedantry.

> A really cultured woman, like a really cultured man, is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge.... She neither spouts poetry nor quotes Cicero on slight provocation; not because she thinks that a sacrifice must be made to the prejudices of men, but because that mode of exhibiting her memory and Latinity does not present itself to her as edifying or graceful. She does not write books to confound philosophers, perhaps because she is able to write books that delight them. In conversation she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you, without wanting to make you aware that you *can't* understand her. She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture—she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence.

Byatt's method in the construction of her plots, like her method in her allusions, is a kind of endless mitosis. By the end of the quartet, there are fifty-seven characters. (This number does not include minor walk-ons, or those characters that appear only in the three previous novels.) There are a dozen plots. Will Daniel Orton reconcile with his children? Will Gerard Wijnnobel be humiliated by his insane wife? Will the Ottokar twins lead separate lives? Will nutso Joshua Lamb become a cult leader? Will Lucy Nighby be jailed for murdering her abusive husband? Will Jacqueline Winwar marry Luk? Will Marcus realize he is gay? Will the heroine's divorce-bruised son ever learn to read? Will the anti-university radicals riot? Will the academic conference dissolve in petty scandal? Will Frederica have a fulfilling career? With whom will she wind up in bed?

Byatt obscures her collapse into costumed melodrama not only with her "erudition" and the stoat-like multiplication of characters. She also likes, as she puts it, to "play serious games with the variety of possible forms of narrating the past." She came to this wrinkle-browed Parcheesi after writing the second novel of her quartet, *Still Life*. Number two made plain her inadequacies as a novelist. It opens in 1954, and its main protagonist is Daniel Orton, a good-hearted, adequately educated clergyman. He falls in love, for the first time, with pretty Cambridge-educated Stephanie Potter, who has returned to the small-town boarding school near Yorkshire where her violently anti-religionist father Bill Potter teaches. Daniel is a believer, but he became a vicar only so as to be useful. He is basically a social worker of moorland tragedies, in the days before psychiatry became therapy and lost its stigma. Stephanie marries this curate her father despises not because she is a be-

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liever, but because the portly Daniel is an unaccountably compelling lover. (*Still Life* is *Scenes from Clerical Life* with orgasm.) Stephanie tries to write a book about Wordsworth, a carryover from university dreams, but she finds that pregnancy weakens the mind and child-rearing scatters it. After her second child is born, Stephanie dies in a freak accident at the book's end. Her father, at her death, comes to see that he was wrong about Daniel.

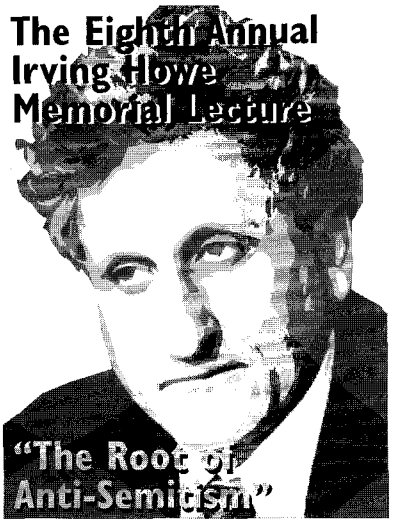
The curious thing about this earnest novel is that moral questions never animate its sensible tweed. Bill Potter still attends the wedding. He rants, but then he does no harm. Stephanie's postponement of her ambitions never reaches the grim complexity of Dorothea's embalmment in her marriage to Casaubon. Stephanie's death (she is accidentally electrocuted by her ungrounded refrigerator) is pointless to the point of risibility. Daniel's reaction to it is to go walking, take buses, sleep in ditches. "Won't bore you with all that," he says to a friend. "Don't think I knew where I was going, rightly—the idea was to finish myself off, tire myself out, like—go to nothing." Byatt lets his journey happen offstage. The ways in which a good and practical man walks his way through shattering loss and backs away from nothing hold no interest for her.

THESE ARE PEOPLE? BYATT gives an unsatisfactory explanation of her standpoint in a number of her essays. She intended *Still Life* to be "a bare precise novel, telling things (birth, marriage, death) exactly, recognizably, without metaphor or analogy." But writing straight, no curlicues, "was in fact impossible for someone with the cast of mind I have." When she wrote about a potted cyclamen, she wanted to bring into the novel the cyclamen's literary associations, "some archetypal metamorphosing procession of flowers, from the odor of a rose, through Milton's language-flower, and Mallarmé's language flower, 'l'absente de tous bouquets.'" She came to the conclusion that in writing *Still Life* without such elaborations, she was "doing violence to something in my own mental constitution."

So she healed herself with *Possession*. She called it a postmodern romance. She saw it as detective story, biography, medieval verse romance, modern romantic novel, Hawthorne's fantastic historical romance, campus novel, Victorian third-person narration, epistolary novel, forged-manuscript novel, and primitive fairy tale of the three women, filtered through Freud's account of the theme in his paper on the Three Caskets. Byatt claims her interest in character and narrative diminished after *Still Life*. "I felt a need to *feel* and *analyze* less, to tell more flatly, which is sometimes more mysteriously. The real interest of this to a writer is partly in the intricacies of the choice of words from line to line. I found myself crossing out psychological descriptions, or invitations to the reader to enter the characters' thought-process." Byatt also thought that an interest in fairy tales is "something the young have, and the aging rediscover. Analysis of motives and responsibilities is for the middle years when human beings are in the middle of decision-making and choosing partners." *Babel Tower*, the quartet's third novel, appeared eleven years after *Still Life*, and it is the perfect product of these pseudo-discoveries.

Babel Tower's unadorned plot is pure soap opera. Frederica Potter, the quartet's heroine, flees the country manor of her violent husband with her four-year-old son, barely escaping his evil grasp in London and narrowly winning custody of their child thanks to the gentle-hearted social worker who finally, after many setbacks, sees how deeply the heroine loves her son. Byatt spikes this sentimental soup with dreary intoxicants: court transcripts, divorce petitions, a children's story, letters, newspaper clippings, poetry, journal entries, and a book written by one of the characters. This book-within-a-book runs for hundreds of pages alongside the present scraps and bits. It is a Marquis de Sade fairy tale, pornography in green britches and white stockings, a sadomasochistic allegory of bull pizzles. As if worried that not even all this will fig her silliness, Byatt then introduces ethnomethodology and the Dewey decimal preoccupations of *A Whistling Woman*. The cast of characters doubles, triples, replicates unto many digits. The new characters, academics who work in specialized scientific pursuits, take the foreground, while the Potters of the realistic narrative recede.

WHY DID BYATT, WHO SO loves George Eliot, philander with fairy tales and leave her great heroine for the pleasures of pastiche? The



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answer lies partly in Byatt's morality, which is unimaginative. It is, essentially, good girlism. She thinks that the 1960s push for "relevance" in education, which did away with rote learning and the memorization of literature, was wrong. She thinks it is wrong, too, that men, despite all the social change that the 1960s wrought, have legal and social advantages over women. She thinks it is wrong to advocate complete freedom: her Sadeian tale is a parable with that lesson, as is the cult led by the madman Joshua Lamb, and the sophomoric inconsequence of the anti-university radicals. We need rules, and without them we flounder and ultimately decay.

And so we do; but this wisdom may not be enough to build a novel on. The Sadeian tale, the cult, the student rebels: from the start, we know that they are doomed and foolish. The 1960s, it is now safe to say, did not change human nature. And the inanity of the decade makes it less interesting for the purposes of art. It is certainly hard to sustain four novels totaling 1,858 pages on such panegyrics to probity. A novel needs, well, real feelings. But Byatt is ashamed of them. It cripples her mind. It leaves her heroine Frederica Potter with little to be but silly.

Where Are You

where are you, irritated crowd, the trap, the ink?
you bitch, ships loaded with maize, old man in Epidauros
squirting, the lacquer, dark burning casks of the gasoline
of the Christian world
wet woolen rags over the ears, the drill

where are you, Mary, the thorns, Campo Santo?
white blue suits, pilgrims with light
here is petroleum, triangle, the day,
heavy bell, the cement ripped apart

where are you, setting hours, burning suns?
hungry running machines, Satan's tide
the earth is rolling, the lingam wrapped in paper
hard precision of meter, bag of bread

where are you, noble children, woods of fire?
frozen straps, swords of pure platinum
throngs, killing of herons on the ice, harbors
soft tar in Buñuel, blunt mitres

where are the playgrounds between birchtrees,
equilibrium
outlines of mescaline, golden green bedrizzled planks
here in the sun, almond, April shines
the tribes are opening the boiling mouths of the Lord

TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

—translated from the Slovenian by Anselm Hollo and the author

WHEN FIRST WE SEE Frederica, she is seventeen, and the year is 1952. We are in the north of England, at a rural university. Frederica is a virgin. Her deflowering is the main subject of *The Virgin in the Garden*. Frederica stars in a play about Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen. She falls in love with its playwright. Its rich producer pursues her. She decides to lose her cherry, in a gynecologically instructive but only nominally sexual evening, to a visiting Cambridge intellectual who travels by motorcycle. Frederica, like Byatt, suffers from the delusion that she is what she reads. She thinks that she is flirting when she tells the lusting producer: "Well I know *Phèdre* and *Le Misanthrope* and *Vol de Nuit* and *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* and *Paradise Lost* IX and X and Keats (1820) and *Wuthering Heights* and *Kubla Khan* and Goethe's lyrics, a selection, and *Tonio Kröger* and *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, and I will know *Persuasion* and something by Kleist because those are my A Level set texts. Oh, and some Ovid and Tacitus and *Aeneid* VI." (Not if she were the last woman in the world, any self-respecting man would scream.)

Byatt makes Frederica annoying, exasperating, skinny, red-headed, high-strung, vain, "menacing," "greedy, strained, overpainted." She believes that because Frederica is not idealized, she is complicated. Frederica narrows, consistently through all four books, into two thin strands: a love of reading and a love of fucking, which she likes because "people like me, who think too much, are so glad, so grateful, at least at first, to be overcome by thoughts of lips, hands and eyes." Frederica is also, as Byatt reminds us often, "well-educated," but without a "first-rate mind." And that, alas, is Byatt's condition as well.

There are moments, especially in the beginning of the quartet, when psychological acuity, as Eliot had it, seems nearby. But as the reader rounds the corner Byatt leaves a figurine, instead of the fairly good, fairly known soul that is devoutly wanted. One of the most important of these moments occurs in *The Virgin in the Garden*, when Frederica is "suffering from a generalized wrath" provoked by wanting to lose her virginity. (She is also angry that her Cambridge-educated sister Stephanie is marrying the fat clergyman Daniel Orton.) Frederica takes a bus to Goathland, "hoping vaguely for the sense of disembodiment a good journey can confer." She finds the "disembodiment" not in the journey, but in an internal monologue about why Racine and Shakespeare are different. She concludes, after much Byattian intricacy, that if you look at characters or recurring images, the two bards are similar. The difference, she decides, is that Racine writes in alexandrines and Shakespeare does not. This is, to put it mildly, a starved and precious analysis, one that empties Shakespeare's plays of their humanity. But Frederica misses this, and Byatt, unless she is ridiculing her heroine, does too.

A man named Ed sits next to Frederica on the bus, and she learns that he sells dolls. She has a drink with him at a pub and he diddles her, stopping short of deflowering, on his raincoat under "a somewhat Wordsworthian thorn bush." (In Byatt, a bush is never just a bush.) He then tells her a story about a whore fellating a donkey in a Cairo brothel. Ed and Frederica part ways. By coincidence, she wanders into another tryst, this one between the playwright she is in love with, Alexander, and his married lover, Jennifer, who are copulating in the back seat of Alexander's car.

> She thought, hard. Her day had been bitty, but full of things.... Taken together, as they undoubtedly could be, these things had alarming aspects. If, for instance, you took ... Ed, and Ed's hot swollen tongue to the donkey's

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hot swollen tool, and those to Alexander, and if, for aesthetic elaboration you pressed, in a military sense, the Cathy-Heathcliff aspects of moorland, the crude Freudian view of the upthrust of the spire of Calverley Minster, you had what could be called an organic image that was, there was no question, extremely depressing, if undoubtedly powerful.

But if you kept them separate. If you kept them separate, in many ways you saw them more truly. . . .

One could let all these facts and things lie alongside each other like laminations, not like growing cells. This laminated knowledge produced a powerful sense of freedom, truthfulness and even selflessness, since the earlier organic and sexual linking by analogy was undoubtedly selfish.

Assuming that one could, how would keeping these "things"—a donkey's "hot swollen tool" and the "crude Freudian view" of a church spire—"alongside each other," in thin stacked layers, make them more free, truthful, or selfless? "Laminations" is a muddled metaphor taking the place of insight into a character's inner psychological state—in this case, a young woman's sexual awakening.

IN *STILL LIFE*, APART FROM A wrong-headed attempt to see "laminations" in Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, we are spared more laminations piffle. In *Babel Tower*, Byatt trots out laminations when genuine thought is needed—as, for instance, when Frederica examines why she married her abusive husband. She married "to get it over with, to stop thinking about whether to marry or not." She remembers her day on the moors, when

> a word hit her as a description of a possible way of survival. Laminations. She had been young, and greedy, and acting Princess Elizabeth, the Virgin in Alexander's play, who had had the wit to stay separate, to declare, "I will not bleed," to hang on to her autonomy. And she, Frederica, had had a vision of being able to be all the things she was: language, sex, friendship, thought, just as long as these were kept scrupulously separate, *laminated*, like geological strata, not seeping and flowing into each other like organic cells boiling to join and divide and join in a seething Oneness. Things were best cool, and clear, and fragmented, if fragmented was what they were.

Frederica decides then and there to write a book called *Laminations*, which then begins to appear within *Babel Tower*. The novel's second book-within-a-book opens with prescription instructions for the Pill, a passage from Cinderella, a quote from Elizabeth I, a court excerpt from a murder trial, a story about a disturbed student of Frederica's named Stone, a newspaper column on a murder. Later in *Babel Tower*, Frederica realizes that what she has written

> will not work. The story of Stone is one thing. The legal cut-ups are quirky new *objects*. But the moment she tries to write anything tinged with her own *feelings*, she is disgusted, as though she had touched slime, a metaphor she undoubtedly finds because of her temporary contact with Helix hortensis. If she writes what she feels truly—Leo's strangling arms, the memory of Nigel's blows, John Ottokar's blood-stained belly, disgust overcomes her at its falsity; it is false because it is *banal*, a cliché.

That is the clearest description of Byatt's mind to be found in all the essays and novels she has written all these last thirty years.

BYATT SEEMS TO HOPE THAT including some criticism of herself in her novels will neutralize her shortcomings. So she has Frederica's book *Laminations* published in the middle of *A Whistling Woman*. The reviews have these headlines: "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to doing your own Writing in your Spare Time." "I Ching for intelligent chicks." "Only Disconnect." "A Scissors-and-Paste World." Both positive and negative reviews call it "clever." The hostile reviews add "facile" and qualify clever with "merely clever," "irritatingly clever." Byatt adds, "The friendly ones compared the cut-up technique to Burroughs and Jeff Nuttall, but said that the woman writer lacked the lunge for the jugular or the absolutely subversive intention of these models. They asked if the whole added up to more than the sum of its snipped-off torn-up parts and concluded that on the whole, it probably didn't, it was just very clever."

The epiphany of Byatt's novel, and the quartet, comes when Frederica must make a decision about her future at the close of *A Whistling Woman*. Should she continue to host her television talk show, or should she return to academia? When her lover, Luk Lysgaard-Peacock, delivered a speech at the Body-Mind Conference about snails and the disadvantages of sexual reproduction, she saw that the world "was bigger" than an "English Department." On her television show, she can have people such as Luk, who talk about "Amazon flora and fauna ... explaining genes, and chromosomes and the language of the DNA." Frederica excitedly calls these the "*new* metaphors." Her lover says that the show is "a lot of nonsense, and a lot of mind-twisting and advertisements and political haranguing." She counters that it's "interesting, it's *what is*." Then she gets confused and says, "I'm a mess." Luk remarks that she is making her choice too difficult. She objects.

> "It's harder for a woman."
>
> "And so? You must just whistle harder. Louder. You won't do either perhaps quite as successfully as you would have done a straight university 'career.' But you'll *know more*."
>
> "That's what matters."
>
> "Of course."
>
> And if he had said, you are lovely, and if he had said, I want you exclusively to be *mine*, and if he had said again, "thank you," Frederica would not have been so perturbed in body and mind. The laminations were slipping. Fire was re-arranging them in new patterns. She was full of life, and afraid.

But the laminations, insofar as they slip, have slipped entirely. The lady, in the end, is unafraid, and quite dead. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Breathing

IN A ROOM FULL OF HOLOCAUST survivors, innocuous statements can take on uncanny connotations. "You want your characters to *breathe*," the cheerful workshop leader urges, leading a group of 20 or so survivors through a writing exercise to help them get started on their memoirs. Begin with specific details, the instructor encourages her would-be autobiographers, and don't worry about getting down all the facts of what happened. Her students are confused by this advice: What could be more important than what happened? One woman tries to read aloud her account of hiding out in the woods with a dog but soon puts her paper aside and tells the story from memory. A man breaks into tears while reading his story of liberation by a Russian soldier: "I threw my arms around him and said, 'Thank you, you saved my life, I am Jewish.' He pushed me away and said, 'Of all the people in the world, I had to save a Jew.' "

THE WORKSHOP WAS PART OF THE TRIBUTE to Holocaust Survivors, which took place last weekend as part of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's tenth-anniversary festivities. Around 2,000 survivors, accompanied by nearly 5,000 friends and family members, came to Washington for this "Reunion of a Special Family," as it was billed. I count myself a member of this family: My grandparents, originally from Poland, are survivors, and my mother was born in a displaced-persons' camp shortly after the war. Like all families, this "special family" has its customs and its secrets, its taboos and its private jokes. The moderator of one panel I attended, apologizing for running out of time for questions, invited anyone with "a burning issue" to approach him afterward. Then he looked embarrassed: "Did I really say that?" There was light laughter.

MOST OF THE WEEKEND'S EVENTS WERE carefully designed to keep the survivors in the foreground. A banquet tent behind the museum was transformed into a "Survivor Village," with people gathering for lunch in clusters around tables marked "Kindertransports," "Bessarabia," "Ravensbrück." A long bulletin board quickly became a collage of notes handwritten in black marker on index cards, many with the idiosyncratic punctuation and spelling of immigrants uncomfortable in English: "Moniek Galas, my uncle, died in Buchenwald. If you knew him, call me. Debbie." "Looking for Rumkowski orphans, Lodz Ghetto." "Does anyone know what happened to a 16 year old boy Moshe Fogel from Munkócs Ghetto and Bátyu, Bótnágy, arrived to Auschwitz May 1944."

BUT PALPABLE, IF LARGELY UNDISCUSSED, was the fact that this was almost certainly the last such gathering. As the generation of survivors disappears, the question of what role their descendants must play in the coming years takes on a new urgency. Elie Wiesel alluded to it in his remarks at the official ceremony Sunday afternoon. "Surrounded by your children and grandchildren, fellow survivors, do you feel joy in your hearts?" he asked. "If so, it is not void of sadness; it cannot be. ... Close your eyes and see the invisible faces of those we have left behind." But the other participants placed more emphasis on the future than on the past. The highlight of the ceremony was the burial of a time capsule containing photographs, copies of speeches, and other items commemorating the event in front of the museum's Hall of Remembrance. As two children, aided by Wiesel, scooped a few symbolic shovelfuls of earth onto the capsule, there was audible weeping on the plaza. Afterward, families waited patiently to pose for photos in front of the spot.

THIS TIME CAPSULE, WITH ITS CLEAR emphasis on the here and now, suggests that the museum is still uncertain about how to commemorate the survivors as well as the victims. What will be more important 50 years from now—the fact that people gathered for a "tribute weekend" or the perpetuation of the memory of those who were there? If the survivors' legacy is to continue in their absence, it must be about something larger than them. In April 1993, when the museum first opened, there was some debate over whether it should focus exclusively on the Holocaust or include other instances of genocide, perhaps in a separate wing. Though this idea was quickly rejected, comparisons were nonetheless unavoidable. The war in the Balkans served as a macabre backdrop to the inaugural ceremony, at which Wiesel rebuked President Clinton for his lack of intervention: "We cannot tolerate the excruciating sights of this old new war." For every mention of the Holocaust as a unique event, it seemed, there had to be another reinforcing its relevance to contemporary society. The museum "teaches what must be taught," *The New York Times* editorialized at the time. "How can anyone doubt the need for such instruction in a world that has produced 'ethnic cleansing'?"

MANY ARE STILL DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE. Speaking at the tribute ceremony, Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, said that, if museums and other institutions dedicated to the Holocaust "are to represent us, they must respect our experience, respect both its Jewishness and its universality." Moments later, he referred to the museum as a "permanent memorial to the Jewish uniqueness of the Holocaust. ... It is our voice which will continue to tell our story." Inside, an exhibit titled "Decade of Genocide" displayed photographs of atrocities that have taken place since the museum's founding: a pair of eyes staring from a hospital bed in Sarajevo; corpses piled in a mass grave in Rwanda; a little boy, naked from the waist down, crying and clinging to the legless body of a man. Underneath was a quote from Wiesel: "A memorial unresponsive to the future would violate the memory of the past."

"THERE IS SOMETHING TRULY UNIVERSAL about a corpse," my colleague Leon Wieseltier wrote in these pages upon the museum's opening. "Anybody who looks at these images of corpses and sees only images of Jews has a grave moral problem." This balancing act, uncertain as it sometimes is, is the unavoidable legacy of the Holocaust. All the time capsules and memoirs in the world cannot replace the physical presence of those who survived the war. But it does not detract from the memory of those who died, or from the pain of the survivors, to allow their experiences to remind us of others' suffering. There is enough mourning to go around.

RUTH FRANKLIN

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Future Recalls Require Further Reform

Bill Whalen is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

California is the first state in more than eighty years to recall a sitting governor. Is this an outlier event a fluke or part of a larger anti-incumbent strain? Would those states without a recall mechanism be wise to follow California's lead?

The Golden State's voter rebellion fits into a national nonpartisan pattern. Democratic governor Gray Davis was recalled a month after Alabama voters rejected a $1.2 billion tax hike crafted by their Republican governor. Recall movements are afoot in Nevada and Wisconsin against both Republican and Democratic lawmakers who either raised taxes or refused to support a property-tax freeze.

At present, eighteen states have recall laws: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin. Political activists may attempt to add such provisions to more state constitutions as a means of reining in incumbents—in the same vein as the term-limit laws of a decade ago.

If recall does go national, it should reflect populist sentiment, not partisan desires. States should improve on the California model with the following reforms in mind:

More-Specific Grounds. California law says recall is appropriate as "the public good may require." Other states are more detailed. Montana limits its recall grounds to physical or mental lack of fitness, incompetence, violation of the oath of office, or failure to perform duties prescribed by law.

Quicker Process. In California, opponents have 160 days to collect recall petition signatures. Nevada allows only sixty days, which seems more sensible, as a quicker timeline makes for less of a distraction to lawmakers.

Higher Threshold. California law requires signatures from only 12 percent of the voters who cast ballots in the last gubernatorial election. Most recall states have a threshold of 25 percent (in Kansas, it's 40 percent). Given the sophistication of professional signature gatherers, a threshold higher than California's is appropriate.

Limited Ballot. California law requires a $3,500 deposit for gubernatorial replacement candidates. Not surprisingly, 135 candidates cluttered the ballot. In Nevada, replacement candidates have to collect the same number of signatures (128,000) as those required to force a recall vote. This safeguard weeds out nonserious candidates and instills public confidence in the process.

Minimize Politics. Critics said that California's recall was a partisan ploy by Republicans to reverse the results of the last election. New Jersey law avoids this by putting only the governor's name on the ballot—no replacement candidates—with the job going to the state Senate leader should the incumbent lose. One wonders what effect this would have had on California's outcome, had the only alternative to the Democratic governor been a fellow Democrat.

Despite its flaws, California's recall was a resounding success. Voter turnout increased, as did the media's interest. In this regard, the recall had a therapeutic effect on a dispirited California electorate. Other states may be as fortunate if they experiment with direct democracy—but only if they improve on what California has started.

—Bill Whalen

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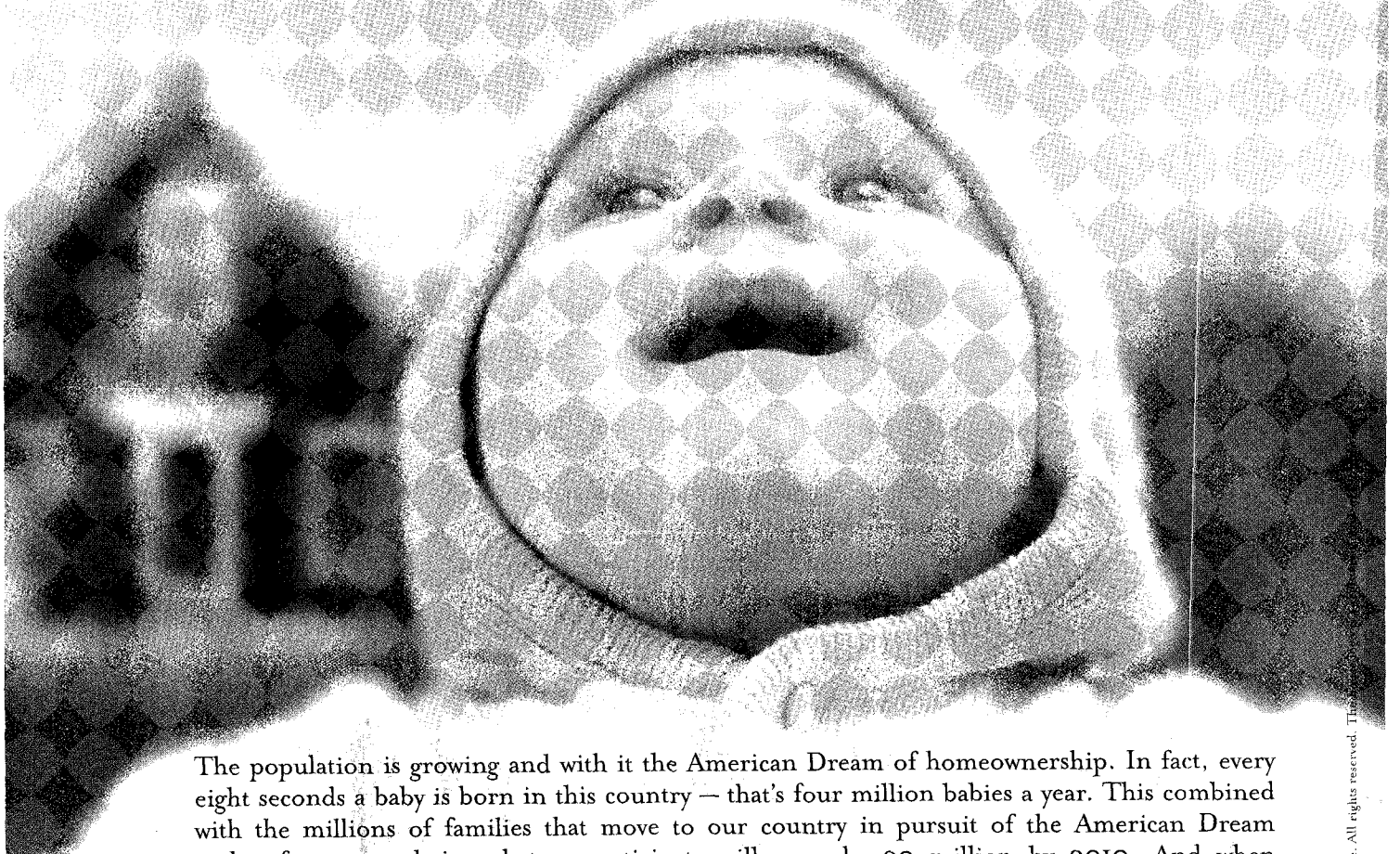

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